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CRITICISM

a quarterly for literature and the arts

ARTICLES BY

JACK M. STEIN ON "TRISTAN AND ISOLDE" AS
MUSIC OF THE FUTURE
FRANK DOGGETT ON ABSTRACTION AND WALLACE
STEVENS
TAYLOR CULBERT AND JOHN M. VIOLETTE ON
WALLACE STEVENS' EMPEROR
ALFRED WERNER ON THE RETURN OF AUGUSTE
RODIN
MAX F. SCHULZ ON KEATS'S TIMELESS ORDER OF
THINGS: A MODERN READING OF "ODE TO
PSYCHE"
STANLEY B. GREENFIELD ON "PASTORS AND MAS-
TERS": THE SPOILS OF GENIUS
MOTHER MARY ANTHONY ON VERBAL PATTERN
IN "BURN'T NORTON I"

*Reviews by Theodore J. Prichard, Chester H. Cable,
Haskell M. Block, W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Harry Levin*

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Tristan and Isolde As "Music of the Future"

Opera and Drama is Richard Wagner's major theoretical work. An essay of some 325 pages published in 1851, it contains a minutely detailed exposition of his word-tone-drama, a unique form of art synthesis which broke radically with operatic tradition. Discarding all the conventions and stereotypes of opera, Wagner evolved in this great essay a theoretical art form, the central characteristic of which was a total synthesis of poetry, music, and drama; a form in which each of the separate components was rigidly subordinated to the total effect. In fact, Wagner even denies the validity of poetry, music and drama as independent forms of art at this period. To him they are but incomplete phases of the one true art form, an organic synthesis of all three, "which is to include all phases of art and in doing so to consume, to destroy each one, so to speak, in favor of the total purpose of them all."¹ This is an extreme position, but Wagner argues it at length and with conviction. Nor does he stop at generalities; he provides at the same time an amazingly exhaustive discussion of exactly how this synthesis is to be effected.

Opera and Drama was written just before Wagner began work intensively on what finally resulted in the monumental tetralogy, *The Ring of the Nibelung*, the work with which this theory is therefore most closely linked. It has been customary to regard *Opera and Drama* as the theoretical basis for all the other works of Wagner's maturity as well (*Tristan*, *The Mastersingers*, and *Parsifal*), though in another

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The present article is an adaptation of two chapters from a forthcoming book, *Richard Wagner and the Synthesis of the Arts*, to be published by Wayne State University Press.

¹ Richard Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften und Dichtungen*, 12 vols. (Leipzig, n. d.), III, 60. Translations are my own. All references are to the original German.

article I have argued that it is erroneous to do so.² For only three years after this blue-print of a three-fold synthesis of music, poetry and stage action, in which each was considered incomplete in itself, and was ingeniously subordinated to the greater unity, Wagner encountered the art theories of Schopenhauer, which explicitly denied the possibility of such a synthesis. Nevertheless, Wagner found the philosopher's unique view of music too fascinating to resist, and accepted it with enthusiasm, though he was unwilling to relinquish his own theories on synthesis, in spite of the basic incompatibility of the two positions.

In the first pages of Book Three of *The World As Will and Idea*, Schopenhauer identifies the Kantian *Ding-an-sich*, which he accepts as the ultimate reality behind the world of phenomena, as the metaphysical will, and sets up the eternal Ideas or unchanging forms of Plato as direct objectifications of this will, a kind of generic mid-point, independent of the laws of time, space and causality, between the will and the phenomenal world. All forms of art except music, argues Schopenhauer later in Book Three, are revelations in terms of phenomena of these eternal Ideas. Music alone is independent of the world as representation, since it does not derive its material from phenomena, and is an objectification, not of the Ideas, but of the metaphysical will itself. "Music, having no connection with the ideas, is independent also of the phenomenal world. . . . Music is by no means, like the other arts, an image of the Ideas: but an image of the will itself, whose objectification the Ideas are. It is for this reason that the effect of music is so much mightier and more penetrating than that of the other arts; for these speak only of the shadow, music however of the essence."³ Music is to Schopenhauer, then, a kind of eternal Idea itself; in fact, he asserts that music could exist even if the phenomenal world were non-existent.

Not only did Wagner accept this glorification of music as a super-art but it so affected his views on art and his creative faculties that one can say he was never again the same as an artist after having read it. I do not believe it is overstating the case to say that Wagner's creative work from this time on takes a new direction and that everything subsequently produced would have had a very different form if Schopenhauer's influence had been absent.

² "The Influence of Schopenhauer on Wagner's Concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*," *Germanic Review*, XXII (April, 1947), 92-105.

³ Arthur Schopenhauer, *Sämtliche Werke*, 6 vols. (Leipzig, n. d.), I, 340. Translations are my own. All references are to the original German.

It is at once clear that the alignment of the arts on the principle of equality in a synthesis which is to "destroy each one . . . in favor of the total purpose of them all" is incompatible with Schopenhauer's view of the exceptional position of music. Wagner must have been aware of this from the start, because Schopenhauer spells out his rejection of a synthesis of the arts in no uncertain terms. And indeed, the composer eventually tackled the problem head on in *Beethoven*, where he formulated a new theory of synthesis using Schopenhauer's view of music as its starting point.⁴ But in the meantime, the philosopher's influence at first manifests itself in a less systematic, if no less pervasive, way.

Two works which show the effect of Schopenhauer's esthetics as a strong, one could almost say involuntary, undercurrent beneath a theory and practice which are ostensibly still compatible with the theories of *Opera and Drama* are "Music of the Future," an essay written in 1861, and *Tristan and Isolde*, finished in 1859, the subjects of the present article. Ever since the publication of *The Art-Work of the Future* in 1850, Wagner's music had been derisively labelled "Zukunftsmusik" ("music of the future") in certain circles. Wagner became more and more annoyed at this term, as we see in numerous letters and public statements, and took the opportunity in 1861 to set the record straight, or so he hoped. He did this in a typically Wagnerian preface of some fifty pages to a French prose translation of four of his works. In this preface, which he entitled "Music of the Future" (the quotation marks are important), he hoped to dispel all the error and prejudice which second-hand reports about his theories had spread by an accurate restatement of those ideas.

But his new Schopenhauerian position caused interesting complications. What Wagner intended as a restatement of the *Opera and Drama* argument reveals itself on closer study to be a tentative attempt to realign the elements of his art synthesis in a manner compatible with Schopenhauer's view of music. There is no evidence that Wagner was aware of this shift; indeed, as we shall see, he seems to be of the opinion that his theoretical position, as well as his artistic production, is still fully compatible with the theory of *Opera and Drama*. But it is easy to prove the inaccuracy of this by an analysis of the essay.

Wagner's chief battle on the philosophical front had to be fought against Schopenhauer's categorical rejection of the idea of any genuine synthesis of music with the other arts. There are many passages in

⁴ See article cited in footnote 2.

Schopenhauer which read like a direct contradiction to the whole basis of Wagner's work: "Grand opera is the creation, not of a pure artistic sense, but of the somewhat barbaric notion that esthetic enjoyment can be heightened by amassing the means, by the simultaneity of totally distinct varieties of impression; and that the effect can be strengthened by an increase in the total mass." Instead of being able to devote itself to the music alone, "the mind is acted upon during such highly complex opera music simultaneously through the eye by the most colorful spectacle, the most fantastic scenes, and the most animated impressions of light and color; and at the same time the plot of the work occupies it. The mind is diverted, distracted, stupefied by all this, and is thus made unreceptive to the sacred, mysterious, intense language of tones. Thus such products work directly against the attainment of the musical purpose."⁵ "The text of an opera should never leave a subordinate position, in order to make itself the chief element and the music a mere means of expressing it. This is a great mistake and an awful absurdity. For everywhere music expresses only the quintessence of life and its events, never these in themselves . . . therefore when music joins too closely to words and seeks to mold itself to events, it is attempting to speak a language which is not its own."⁶

Of course, Wagner could not go so far in his discipleship of Schopenhauer as to accept such conclusions. While he welcomed the idea of the uniqueness of music, he had perforce to defend the legitimacy of his art synthesis. And so, using as a point of departure Schopenhauer's view of music as a revelation of the inner world, independent of the laws of causality and logic, Wagner constructed in "*Music of the Future*" an ingenious argument for his musical drama. Music, says Wagner, is capable of revelations greater than those of any other art, because it operates in an inner realm beyond the laws of logic and causality. The human, bound by these laws, is easily confused when confronted with the supra-logical revelations of music. In this the dramatic poet, if he works hand in hand with the musician, can be the mediator. The sympathetic emotion of the listener can be so profoundly affected by the drama that he is transported into an ecstatic state wherein he is in a receptive condition for the supra-logical revelations of the music.

In tracing the steps leading to this conclusion, we shall see that they are in significant ways incompatible with the opinions of *Opera and Drama*. Although Wagner intended "*Music of the Future*" to be a

⁵ Schopenhauer, *Sämtliche Werke*, V, 457.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 345.

shortened restatement of his arguments and conclusions in the works of the 1849-51 period, the summaries are actually a very inaccurate reflection of the originals. Wagner gives us an unwitting confirmation of these inaccuracies by stating in the early pages of his essay that he is writing the summaries without having reread the original documents. His reason: he has not been in the proper frame of mind to review his own theories!

In "Music of the Future" Wagner significantly accepts poetry and music as separate and legitimate forms of art. In *Opera and Drama* he had refused to admit their right to exist as separate entities outside a synthesis. The history of music which he outlined in that essay and in *The Art-Work of the Future* was a continuous account of the various subterfuges that composers have invented throughout the ages to attempt to compensate for the inadequacy of expression of music alone.⁷ In "Music of the Future" his supposed summary of this discussion traces the gradual emergence of music as an independent art form. He speaks of Italian Renaissance church music, for instance, as producing "such a wonderful, intensely moving effect . . . that absolutely no other art is capable of anything comparable."⁸ In *The Art-Work of the Future* he had said, "Counterpoint is artificial art playing with itself, the mathematics of feeling, the mechanical rhythm of egoistic harmony."⁹ Contrapuntal harmony, says Wagner now in "Music of the Future," produces "an absolutely unique effect of the most irresistible power."¹⁰

Wagner's account of the development of the symphony through Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven, is highly colored by Schopenhauer. He writes that the symphony is a direct revelation out of another world. It discloses a relationship of phenomena quite different from the logical one to which we are accustomed, and thus confuses us. Though it overwhelms us emotionally, it is unable to satisfy our logical reasoning powers.¹¹ This is the definition of music he needs in order to perform his new kind of musical-dramatic synthesis.

Wagner goes even farther astray in his ostensible account of his previous discussions of the development of poetry. In "Music of the Future" he stresses the preoccupation of great poets with the problem of the relation of drama and music. The earlier essays actually contained no such discussion. He contrasts the theoretical willingness of Voltaire, Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller to accept a combination of the

⁷ Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften*, III, 81-101; 233-320.

⁸ *Ibid.*, IV, 107.

⁹ *Ibid.*, III, 88.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, VII, 108.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, VII, 110.

two arts with their antipathy toward opera, which was the only form in which such a combination existed. What is it, asks Wagner, that makes the poet so intensely interested in music? In his desire to add an emotional impact to the conventional meaning of his verse, he employs rhythmic devices and the "almost musical decorative effect of rhyme."¹² (In *Opera and Drama* Wagner had categorically rejected regular rhythmic patterns and above all rhyme as poetic devices.) But the poet senses his limitations and recognizes the far greater potentiality of music for emotional appeal. It is for this reason that he seeks a union of poetry and music.

Just as the poet needs the musician, says Wagner, so also the musician needs the poet, because the revelations of music cannot be brought to the listener as long as he is still bound to the laws of causality. The listener is moved emotionally, but is confused by the new values which are being revealed, and in his uncertainty he grasps for the support of those laws to which he is accustomed. He asks the question: why? He can receive no answer from the music. The dramatic poet, aware of the capabilities of the musician, must here come to the listener's aid. By casting his dramatic poem in a form in which it penetrates into the most delicate threads of the musical texture, he can so completely capture the emotional sympathy of the listener by the visible performance of a life-like action that the listener is transported into an ecstatic state in which he no longer feels his connection with the causal world and submits himself to the new laws which are revealed to him by the music.¹³

It is clear that this theory replaces the three-fold union of poetry, visual action and music of *Opera and Drama* with a new dual synthesis of drama and music. It is equally evident that the role of music in this synthesis is a more independent one. Nevertheless, Wagner, not conscious of any such basic alteration in the elements of his synthesis, goes on to explain that the technique of uniting the verse with the music was to be as outlined in *Opera and Drama*.¹⁴ The principles of modulation, harmonic elucidation by the orchestra, coincidence of verse and speech accent, musical and poetic alliteration (to which has been added rhyme), musical underlining of gesture, and his motifs of reminiscence, all of which he expounded in such detail in that essay, he still assumed to be valid. But with the change in emphasis in favor of music, a modification in the application of these principles and a relaxation of the rigidity with which music was coordinated with verse and

¹² *Ibid.*, VII, 104.

¹³ *Ibid.*, VII, 112.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, VII, 112.

action was inevitable. We shall see that this is exactly what took place in *Tristan and Isolde*.¹⁵

This loosening of the controls, so to speak, is implicit in the course of the remainder of the essay, in which Wagner goes on to assert that neither the musician nor the poet need sacrifice any of his powers to this union. Quite to the contrary, he states, both will feel more unconstrained. For without the collaboration of poetry, the musician would hesitate to give free rein to the limitless possibilities of musical expression for fear of awakening the impulse in the listener to ask: why? Such union gives him the necessary link with the phenomenal world which makes this restraint superfluous. And the poet who is aware of the limitless expressive potentialities of the music will consciously strive to fit his poem to the fine nuances of the music. In so doing, he will perceive a greatly widened scope of emotional appeal, and his awareness of this will make it possible for him to draft the poetic conception with boundless freedom.¹⁶ The poet will say to the musician, "Plunge fearlessly into the full tide of the sea of music; hand in hand with me you can never lose touch with what is most comprehensible to everyone; for because of me you stand on the solid ground of the dramatic action, and that action at the moment of its presentation on the stage is the most directly understandable of all poems. Expand your melody boldly so that it pours like a ceaseless stream over the entire work: in it say what I refrain from saying because only you can say it, and silently I will utter everything because it is my hand that guides you."¹⁷ In comparison with the highly disciplined relationship which obtained in *Opera and Drama*, it is evident from this quotation that the mutual freedom from restraint is more significant for the music than for the poetry.

"*Music of the Future*" is the essay in which Wagner makes the famous remark, so often incautiously cited by Wagner scholars, about *Tristan and Isolde*: "I will allow the strictest demands growing out of

¹⁵ Though here it is somewhat hidden under the superstructure of the *Opera and Drama* summaries, it is this new alignment which ultimately wins out in both theory and practice and culminates in the elaborate new theory of synthesis expounded in *Beethoven*, as well as, more significantly, in the quite different alignment of elements in his later music dramas.

¹⁶ This idea is later elaborated into a theory of improvisation in an essay, "The Destiny of Opera," *Sämtliche Schriften*, IX, 127-156, a work which is in many ways the theoretical counterpart of *The Mastersingers*. See my article, "Wagner's Theory of Improvisation and *Die Meistersinger*," *Germanic Review*, XXVII (April, 1952), 96-107.

¹⁷ Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften*, VII, 129.

my theoretical assertions to be made of this work."¹⁸ When considered in the light of the theory just discussed, it can be seen that its implications are quite different from what they seem when used out of context. *Tristan* should be considered as the creative parallel to the point of view expressed in "Music of the Future," which we have seen to be a quite different one from *Opera and Drama*. It is a major error to use this statement as ex post facto proof that in *Tristan* the principles of *Opera and Drama* were in full force. Any possible doubt as to the true state of affairs is dispelled by the continuation of this remark. Wagner goes on to say, "not because I shaped it according to my system, for I had completely forgotten all theory; but because here at last I moved with the utmost freedom and with utter disregard of any theoretical scruple, to such an extent that while I wrote I had the sense of far surpassing my system. Believe me, there is no greater satisfaction for the artist than this feeling of total lack of reflection which I experienced in writing my *Tristan*."

The very conception of *Tristan* coincides with Wagner's sudden discovery of Schopenhauer, and his letters give us abundant evidence that his enthusiasm for that philosophy was a constant spur to the composition of poem and music. The "Schopenhauerian" language of the second act particularly has been the subject of frequent discussion, but it is in the role of music as part of the synthesis where the Schopenhauer influence is most significant. Although the principles of synthesis from *Opera and Drama* are the basis for the work, and certain portions of the drama (particularly Isolde's narrative, the drinking of the love potion, and the great speech of King Marke) are as magnificent examples of the *Opera and Drama* synthesis as are to be found anywhere, it can be shown that in most of the work (from the drinking of the potion to the end) the music is so overwhelmingly dominant that what seems to be a synthesis on the basis of a three-fold relationship of words, music, and action is closer to glorification of music as a virtually independent super-art.

The poem of *Tristan and Isolde*, though it shares many characteristics with the *Ring* poetry, is even more highly concentrated and contains rhyme and assonance, in addition to a great deal of alliteration. Wagner had been scornful about rhyme in *Opera and Drama* (there is, of course, none in the *Ring* poetry), and his use of it in *Tristan* is a definite break with the theoretical position of that essay, yet perhaps not so much so as it might at first seem. Wagner had rejected rhyme

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, VII, 119.

because it lent undue emphasis to the last syllable of the line, which often was thereby given a prominence it did not warrant conceptually or emotionally. With very few exceptions in *Tristan* the rhyming word is a key word in the sentence, and the rhyme is felt to be commensurate with its importance in the verse. Strengthening further this use of rhyme, Wagner frequently uses it as he had alliteration in the *Ring* poems and, as he elucidated in *Opera and Drama*, for purposes of establishing emotional contrasts: "mir erkoren, mir verloren" ("chosen by me, lost to me"); "da die Männer sich all' ihm vertragen, wer muss nun Tristan schlagen?" ("since the men all make peace with him, who is to strike Tristan down?"); "Unabwendbar ew'ge Not für kurzen Tod!" ("Inevitable eternal distress for quick death"); "seiner Treue frei'ste Tat traf mein Herz mit feindlichstem Verrat!" ("his loyalty's freest deed struck my heart with hostile treachery!"); or of establishing emotional parallels: "Dem Wunder aller Reiche . . . dem Helden ohne Gleiche!" ("The wonder of all realms, the hero without compare!"); "und heim nach Hause kehre, mit dem Blick mich nicht mehr beschwere!" ("and return home, no longer with his glance to disturb me!"); "O Wonne voller Tücke! O truggeweihtes Glücke!" ("Oh ecstasy full of treachery! oh treacherous happiness!"). Where the music comes most fully to the fore, as in most of Acts Two and Three, and the words are little more than convenient syllables to which the music can be sung, rhyme, with its emphasis on vowel sounds, is more adaptable than alliteration, and we indeed find that in Act Two, the really "symphonic" act, the proportion of rhyme is more than double what it is in the first.

Alliteration is used as in the *Ring* dramas to express parallels and contrasts also: "Wütendem Wirbel" ("raging whirlpool"); "grolende Gier" ("grumbling greed"); "O blinde Augen, blöde Herzen" ("oh blind eyes, foolish hearts"); "der Trank ist's, der mir taugt!" "der Todestrank!" ("this is the potion which suits me!" "the death potion!"); "tör'ger Treue trugvolles Werk" ("foolish loyalty's deceptive work"); "des kühnsten Mutes Königin, des Welten-Werdens Walterin" ("the queen of greatest courage, the ruler of the world's becoming"). In Acts Two and Three, alliterated words are often only sonant carriers of a musical line which is virtually independent of the words (see illustration below, p. 17).

The same is true of Wagner's use of concentrated language, which appears in its most potent form in *Tristan*. There are some powerful examples, such as the famous

| | |
|----------------------|----------------------|
| Mir erkoren,— | By me chosen,— |
| mir verloren,— | by me lost,— |
| hehr und heil,— | splendid and noble,— |
| kühn und feig!— | bold and cowardly!— |
| Tod geweihtes Haupt! | death-devoted head! |
| Tod geweihtes Herz! | death-devoted heart! |

or Tristan's oath of reconciliation (see illustration below, p. 13). Occasionally the concentration gets out of hand and Wagner uses language which takes some effort to unravel:

Befehlen liess' dem Eigenholde Commanded have to the vassal
 Furcht der Herrin ich, Isolde. fear of his lady I, Isolde.

Frequently the high concentration of emotion words serves, as do the rhyming vowels and alliterating consonants, as only a syllabic framework for a dominating musical line, so that the potentialities of the words themselves are lost, as in the lines from Act Two:

| | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| All' Gedenken, | All remembrance, |
| All' Gemahnen, | all recollection, |
| heil'ger Dämm'rung hehres Ahnen | sacred dusk's noble foreknowledge |
| löscht des Wähnens Graus— | extinguishes thinking's dread— |
| welterlösend aus. | redeeming the world. |

most of which is shown with the vocal line in the illustration on p. 17. There are many similar examples from the second and third acts.

In the portions of *Tristan* where a synthesis of word, tone, and action in the *Opera and Drama* sense exists, this synthesis is more intense than any in the preceding works. The poem itself is more highly charged emotionally, more powerfully concentrated. The stage action is stripped to essentials, shifting the attention to the psychology and emotion of the characters. The manner of synthesizing the poetic dialogue with vocal melody is more intense. The following, an impassioned poetic-melodic line, is sung by Isolde shortly after the curtain rises:

Zu to - bender Stür - me wü - ten-dem Wir - bel
 (To raging storms' wild whirlpool)

treibt aus dem Schlaf dies träu - men-de Meer,
 drive from its sleep this dreaming sea,

weckt aus dem Grund sei - ne grol - len - de Gier!
 wake from the depths its grumbling greed!

Zeigt ihm die Beu - te, die ich ihm bie - te! Zer - schlag' —
 Show it the booty I offer! If it will

p. 10

— es dies trot - zi - ge Schiff, des zer - schell - ten Trümmer ver - schling's!
 shatter this defiant ship, the ruin's wreckage it may consume!)

In spite of the frenzied pitch of Isolde's emotion, the balance between word and tone is maintained. (Quite the opposite is true in all similar cases in Acts Two and Three.) The verse and the melody together build up a gradual climax, with the melodic line progressing relentlessly upward, till the peak in word and tone is reached simultaneously on the word "zerschlag'." The climax is further accentuated by the dramatic measure-long pause immediately preceding it, a pause which is inherent in the sense of the words, and by the extended vowel on "zerschlag'," which prolongs the climactic moment. There are fully twenty-one powerful accents in the verse, all of which are increased in force by functional musical synthesis. In accordance with the principles of *Opera and Drama*, the accents are placed on relatively more emphatic steps of the tonal scale, on relatively more forceful beats of the measure, or on higher pitches, in precise coordination with the meaning of the words. The six or seven subdivisions into which verse and melody can be separated progress to minor climaxes of their own. Perfect coordination exists between word and tone.

On a less highly emotional level is the following example from Isolde's narrative:

There is a strong emotional contrast between the two lines of verse because of the startling implications behind this revelation of her discovery. The contrast is aided by the alliteration ("Tantris-Tristan") and by the rhyme ("nannte-erkannte"). The melodic line contributes to the contrast by a chromatic modulation from lower, darker A flat to brighter A, and by the melodic contour on "Tantris" and "Tristan"; the ascending fifth of "Tantris" conveys a somewhat equivocal, uncertain feeling; the descending fifth of "Tristan" implies certainty, definiteness, and here, discovery. The entire composition of the line is dictated by the meaning, and has significance only when related to that meaning. It could not stand as an independent musical phrase.

One of the most masterful word-tone syntheses of the entire drama occurs when Isolde reveals the power exercised over her by Tristan's gaze:

Here again, the blending of word and tone is functional. The melodic line is dependent upon the words to which it is united, and serves the purpose of extending the emotional content of the words into the more expressive sphere of the music. The disjointed character of the melodic line, for instance, is dictated by the sense of the words. Even the beats of the measure on which each syllable is made to fall are minutely calculated to parallel the declamatory aspect of the verse. Especially effective is "das Schwert, ich liess es fallen." Prolongation of the vowel is provided at the climax. The verb "jammerte" is brilliantly portrayed by the melodic contour.

It is invariably stated in guides to *Tristan* that the pointed appearance of the so-called "Love Glance" motif in the orchestra during the measure after the word "Augen" reveals the powerful effect on Isolde of Tristan's gaze. Actually, however, it is the poetic-musical line itself which most convincingly shows this. What the appearance of the motif in the orchestra might communicate has been far more impressively revealed by the preceding words and notes of the dialog.

As a final example of parallelism between word and tone, Tristan's oath from Act One is given here in full:

(gedehnt)
(broadly)

Tris - tans Eh - re - höch - ste Treu', Tris - tans E - lend -
(To Tristan's honor greatest loyalty, to Tristan's suffering

(rasch)
(quickly) (zögernd)
(hesitating) (langsam)
(slowly)

kühn - ster Trotz! Trug des Her - zens! Traum der
boldest defiance! Deception of the heart! Dream of

(gesteigert)
(intensified)

Ah - nung! Ew' - ger Trau - er einz' - ger Trost: Ver -
presentiment! Eternal mourning's only comfort: Forget -

(etwas breit)
(rather broadly) (lebhafter)
(more animated)

ges-sens güt' - ger Trank, dich trink' — ich son - der Wank!
fullness' pleasant draught, I drink you without hesitation!)

p. 89

This is a most impressive illustration of what Wagner called musical alliteration in *Opera and Drama*. Beginning in the key of C minor on the first short phrase, the music goes through a cycle of modulatory harmonies which draw farther and farther away from the tonic C minor as the poetic expression expands. A return to C minor on the last phrase is magnificently effected by use of the Death motif, with its arresting A flat to A opening chords, ("Vergessens güt'ger Trank"). The orchestra sounds the second half of the motif during the ensuing vocal pause—an F minor chord changing to a dominant seventh on G underneath the extended "trink'." The remainder of the vocal line completes the modulation through the dominant back into C minor. The use of the Death motif at this key point is of great emotional significance, establishing a vivid reminiscent link between this and the scene of the motif's first appearance. (See quotation on p. 10 for words to the original Death motif.) This beginning and ending in C minor creates an enclosing musical bond which molds the entire oath into a single musical-poetic unit. Within it are smaller contrasting or parallel alliterative groupings. Of these concentrated poetic expressions, the first and third are bound together by alliteration ("Ehre-Elend"), as are also the second and fourth ("Treu-Trotz"). The musical line also unites the first to the third and the second to the fourth by means of the melodic contour, thus strengthening the effect of the alliteration. At the same time, the ideas behind each meaningful expression are differentiated vividly by their musical treatment, the first contrasting with the second, and the third with the fourth. The phrases which follow build a gradual emotional crescendo to the climax on the last phrase.

Wie sieg - pran - gend, heil - und hehr, laut und
(As splendid in victory, lofty and grand, loudly and

hell wies er auf mich: clearly he pointed me out: "Das wär' ein - Schatz, -
mein. Herr und Ohm; wie dünkt euch die zur Eh?
my lord and uncle; what do you think of her as a wife?"

P. 42

Wagner's portrayal of the subtleties of anger, love, scorn, irony, sarcasm, excitement, etc. through the poetic-musical verse is nowhere else so consummate as in *Tristan* as the selection from Isolde's narrative quoted at the foot of the previous page so magnificently illustrates. The first seven measures are sung in a mock heroic manner to a tune previously associated with praise of Tristan as a hero. The intense bitterness expressed by the ironic parody, "Das wär' ein Schatz" etc., is emphasized by the saccharine quality of the spuriously delicate melodic line, even to the grace note on "Eh'." Isolde's fury is aroused by these thoughts, and a few bars later it reaches its climax on the harsh "mir lacht" of the following:

ein Wink, ich flieg' nach I - ren-land. I - sol - de, die ist
 ("a sign, and I'll rush to Ireland. Isolde will be
 eu - erl mir lacht das A - ben - teu - er!"
 yours! I will enjoy the adventure!")

In Act Two, King Marke shows how deeply wounded he has been by Tristan's infidelity in the words and music of a long speech which begins:

Mir dies? Dies Tris tan mir? — Wo-hin nun
 (This to me? This, Tristan, to me? Where now
 Treu - e, da Tris - - - tan mich be - trog? Wo-hin nun
 is loyalty, since Tristan has betrayed me? Where now
 Ehr' und ech - te Art, da al - ler Eh - renHort, — da Tris -
 are honor and nobility, since the essence of honor, since
 - - tan sie ver - lor?
 Tristan has lost them?)

The irrational intervals of the first four bars are a revealing expression of Marke's incredulity at seeing Tristan as a traitor. The entire excerpt breathes the sorrow that overcomes Marke at the realization of Tristan's faithlessness. The melodic contour manages to convey all the pathos inherent in the verse.

All the preceding illustrations come from those portions of the work where a genuine synthesis in the *Opera and Drama* sense is present. When we turn to other parts (principally Acts Two and Three), we can illustrate a subtle alteration in the adaptation of those principles, which shifts the emphasis so strongly toward the music that both the poetry and the visual action fade into the background. This musical texture, unhampered, as it were, by any partnership, is broader and fuller in scope, richer and more magnificently opulent than any yet to come from Wagner's (or any one else's) pen. In fact, the love music from Act Two, the famous "Liebesnacht," calls to mind Schopenhauer's view (see above, p. 4) that the text of an opera should always be in a subordinate position, so as to allow the music maximum freedom for its more profound revelations.

The principle of prolongation of a vowel sound to intensify the emotional force was proclaimed in *Opera and Drama* and used with great effect in the early *Ring* dramas. In Acts Two and Three of *Tristan* often the syllables thus extended are prolonged to such a degree that the conceptual meaning is submerged, and little remains but pure sound:

Ein - sam wa - chend in — der Nacht, —
(Alone watching in the night, —)
p. 169
wem — der Traum — der Lie - - be lacht, —
on whom the dream of love smiles,)

At a deliberate tempo, with an elaborate orchestral accompaniment, and sung from behind the scenes, the words have no effect. The passage is a magnificent lyric moment, but one to which the word does not contribute.

A similar instance is the climax of the love duet (top of p. 17):

Höch - - - - - ste
(greatest)

Lie - bes - lust! Höch - - - - ste
(love's delight! Greatest)

p. 195

Lie - - - - bes - lust!
love's delight!)

Lie - - - - bes - lust!
love's delight!)

heil' - ger Dämm' rung heh - res Ah - nen
(sacred dusk's noble foreknowledge)

heil' - ger Dämm' - rung heh - res Ah - nen löscht des
(sacred dusk's noble foreknowledge extinguishes)

löscht des Wäh - nens Graus - welt - - - er-lö
extinguishes thinking's dread, redeeming the world.)

Wäh - nens Graus - welt - - - er-lö - - send
thinking's dread, redeeming the world.)

p. 165

send aus.

aus.

These two examples, and many others which could be given, are not a reversion to the traditional disregard of the words which existed before Wagner. The vestiges of functional word-tone relationship are still there: the extension is made nominally to prolong the expression inherent in the words (this is evident especially in the last example, the melodic line ecstatically expressing "höchste Liebeslust"), but it is stretched beyond its farthest limit in the *Opera and Drama* sense.

Similarly, the principles of speech condensation, alliteration and rhyme, all contained in a single example (lower half of p. 17), lose their significance because of the dominating position of music in the word-tone picture. Not only are Tristan and Isolde singing simultaneously, but Isolde's words train one full measure behind Tristan's. As a consequence, of course, the musical pattern dominates. The second act duet contains many such passages of free canonic imitation. In *The Rhinegold*, *The Valkyrie*, and Acts One and Two of *Siegfried* (the works composed between *Opera and Drama* and *Tristan*), duet singing does not occur at all. This is in accord with the *Opera and Drama* theory. In *Tristan*, where music has slipped away from the confines of a three-fold synthesis, we find concerted singing also in evidence. A comparison of the love scene from Act One of *The Valkyrie* with that of *Tristan* illuminates vividly the alteration in technique. There is not a single bar of duet singing in the former. From *Tristan* on it appears in every single work, an unequivocal indication of a growing disregard for the principles of *Opera and Drama*.

Coupled with this new duet technique is a tendency to revert to formal musical phrases without concern for the words to which the melodic design is set. Its effect is to draw the attention of the listener to the beauty of the melodic phrase, to the neglect of the conceptual, as in the following example:

Wie sie es wen - det, - wie sie es en - det,
(However she changes it, however she ends it,) P. 124

was sie mir kü - re, wo - hin mich füh - re, ihr ward ich .zu
whatever she chooses for me, wherever she leads me, hers I

ei - gen: nun lass mich Ge - hor - sam zei - gen!
have become: now let me show my obedience!)

and in numerous others throughout the work.

Climaxes, both orchestral and vocal, in Acts Two and Three, are frequently built on sequences, usually ascending, and moving rapidly. Words are submerged whenever this happens. The example on page 17 illustrates the end of the long sequence pattern of the love duet from Act Two.

The orchestra follows the same pattern we have traced in the verse and in the melodic line. As the medium of harmonic elucidation, it fulfills its function in Act One in a manner which sometimes, to be sure, threatens to overbalance the melodic verse, but at no time disregards the spirit of the principle of subordination to the musical-poetic verse. Even at most climaxes the orchestra is quite definitely held in check. During some of them, it plays almost no role at all, as in Tristan's Oath, where it supplies only tremolo background, except for the Death motif at the end.

In the later acts, the situation changes radically. In Act Three, particularly during Tristan's visions, the orchestra is sustained at a more brilliant pitch for a longer time than in any other scene involving vocal music in all of Wagner's works. The texture is so rich, the tone color is so resplendent, the rhythm is so strongly accentuated, that the voice frequently is well-nigh lost in the tonal and harmonic mass of sound.

There is no more striking illustration of the alteration in the manner of shaping the synthesis than in the leitmotifs of *Tristan and Isolde*. In *Opera and Drama* Wagner had been insistent that the "motifs of reminiscence," as he called them, originate in the vocal line and that their recurrence serve always to recall to the listener's mind the emotion originally associated with the poetic-musical line from which the motif was drawn. Even in *The Rhinegold* and *The Valkyrie* (the only two works completed subsequent to *Opera and Drama*¹⁹ but before the influence of Schopenhauer), Wagner's leitmotifs do not always conform to this theory, though in those two works most of them do. In *Tristan and Isolde*, motifs of reminiscence disappear almost entirely. It is clear that Wagner is no longer concerned with relating specific past actions to subsequent action, except in the one instance of the Death motif, but rather now conceives of leitmotifs as

¹⁹ At the end of Act Two of *Siegfried* Wagner interrupted work on the composition of the *Ring* dramas for twelve years. The composition of both *Tristan* and *The Mastersingers* intervened, and the Wagner who returned to work on the great tetralogy was a creative artist whose convictions had altered considerably. This fact has not received the critical attention it deserves. See my forthcoming book.

orchestral themes to be treated musically as part of a symphonic web. The composer himself throws significant light on the independence and musical self-sufficiency of the leitmotifs in *Tristan* when he speaks of the motifs in the orchestra during the third act as "restlessly emerging, developing, separating, then again reuniting, growing, diminishing, finally clashing, embracing and well-nigh engulfing one another," and points out that, for their fullest expression, they require "most complete harmonization, as well as a most independent orchestral treatment."²⁰

The approximately thirty motifs which occur in *Tristan* are so thoroughly musical and symphonic in character that it is not only irrelevant but virtually impossible to give them accurate names. There is even considerable uncertainty about which are new motifs, and which are variations of ones already stated, because of the fact that almost all are in some way or other variations of the one or two fundamental motifs announced in the opening measures of the prelude. As a consequence, the designations of the majority of the motifs given by interpreters who regard these motifs in essentially the same light as those in the early *Ring* dramas are obscure and contradictory. In spite of their valiant efforts, the connotation even of the principal motif of the drama is quite uncertain:



It is divided into two parts, the ascending chromatic figure of measures three and four occurring well over a hundred times throughout the work. Lavignac²¹ refers to A as "The Confession," and B as "Desire." Kobbé²² calls A: "Tristan," and B: "Isolde," and the two together: "The Love potion," appending the following explanation: "The first part, with its descending chromatics, is pervaded by a certain *triste* mood as if Tristan were still vaguely forewarned by his conscience of the impending tragedy. The second soars ecstatically upward. It is the woman yielding unquestionably to the rapture of requited love." Kufferath²³ designates A as "Tristan's Suffering," B as "Desire," and

²⁰ Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften*, VIII, 186.

²¹ Albert Lavignac, *Le Voyage Artistique à Bayreuth*, 4th ed. (Paris, 1900).

²² Gustave Kobbé, *Wagner's Music Dramas Analyzed with the Leading Motives* (N. Y., 1904).

²³ Maurice Kufferath, *Guide Thématique et Analyse de Tristan et Iseult* (Paris, 1894).

the combination of the two as "Desire, or Philtre." Terry²⁴ refers only to the combined motif and calls it "Love." Ernest Newman²⁵ calls A: "Grief" or "Sorrow," and B: "Isolde's Magic," saying "Number One will be referred to in the following analysis as the Grief or Sorrow motive, though it must be understood that its expression is too complex to be tied down to one descriptive word: it has in it something of pain, something of resignation, something of hopelessness, and much more."²⁶

Furthermore, all the motifs undergo such a wide variety of changes in mood and atmosphere throughout the drama that they cannot reflect any specific mood for very long. Two motifs from the prelude to Act Two are designated as "Ecstasy" and "Ardor," and a motif from later in the act as "Felicity." Certain variations of the "Ardor" motif become more ecstatic than the "Ecstasy" motif; certain variations of the "Ecstasy" motif are as calm and serene as the "Felicity" motif, which in turn, especially during Act Three, works itself up to a frenzied pitch to express the height of Tristan's delirium. It is manifestly absurd to attempt to give specific designations to these motifs.

This entirely different leitmotif method contributes significantly to the dominance of the music and is a major factor in making the music relatively independent of the words. It is this newly won freedom of musical expression which makes possible in *Tristan* and all the later works the unprecedented brilliance of tonal development which the restraints placed upon the music under the *Opera and Drama* principles governing the synthesis made impossible. For in that essay Wagner had written,

When purely musical themes were christened "thoughts," this was either a thoughtless misuse of the word or an example of the self-deception of the musician, who gave the name of thought to a theme, in connection with which he to be sure had thought something, but something which no-one else would understand, except perhaps someone to whom he had imparted in sober words what he had been thinking of. . . . A

²⁴ Edward M. Terry, *A Richard Wagner Dictionary* (N. Y., 1939).

²⁵ Ernest Newman, *Stories of the Great Operas*, 3 vols. in one (N. Y., 1929).

²⁶ Ernst Kurth, in his important *Romantische Harmonik und ihre Krise in Wagners "Tristan,"* 2nd. ed. (Berlin, 1923), discusses a motif (pp. 502 ff.) first appearing in the sixteenth and seventeenth measures of the prelude, which, along with that of the opening measures he claims is the most frequently appearing leitmotif in the entire work, although it is not even recognized as one by the various guides and analyses.

musical motif can . . . produce a definite impression only when the feeling expressed in the motif is imparted as something definite before our eyes by a definite individual in connection with a definite object. The absence of these conditions presents a musical motif to the emotions as something indefinite, and . . . no matter how often it recurs in the same form, it remains for us only the recurrence of something indefinite.²⁷

As for the requirement that the motif be expressed "before our eyes by a definite individual," this is fulfilled in *Tristan* by only one, the before-mentioned Death motif. As a consequence, it alone, among them all, carries with it on each repetition a definite reminiscence of the original words of which it was the musical counterpart, and can be referred to as a motif of reminiscence. It is effectively used with this connotation numerous times throughout the drama. One such is illustrated in the example on page 13.

Tristan and Isolde, like its closest theoretical counterpart, "Music of the Future," is thus revealed as a work which shows unmistakable evidence of the liberating effect of Schopenhauer's views, while still conforming in some degree with Wagner's earlier artistic beliefs. As such, it points both forward to *The Mastersingers*, a work which has almost nothing in common with the earlier theories, and backward to *The Valkyrie*, in which the *Opera and Drama* theories are most completely and faithfully realized.

²⁷ Wagner, *Sämtliche Schriften*, IV, 184f.

Abstraction and Wallace Stevens

Though now a minor passage in literary history, the Imagist controversy made its point so thoroughly that idea has had no settled place in poetry since. New criticism (lately grown old) certainly insists on the something said in poetry but it still seems questionable for a poem to be ratiocinative. Now as the stature of Wallace Stevens begins to show itself as superior to and apart from the disputes of his contemporaries, the place of abstraction in poetry must be sought for, and on his terms, for in his work abstraction again becomes a major element in poetry. In examining that element, I will touch on the function of idea in his poetry and on the usual nature of his ideas, the relations between situation and idea, the distinctions between philosophic and poetic idea, and the character of the abstract and the specific in Stevens' poems. I shall approach this problem as one who reads philosophy mainly to read poetry.

Nearly everyone who writes about Stevens mentions the quasi-philosophical character of his poetry and much of the criticism of Stevens tends to turn into summaries and lists of his ideas. Because of the expository character of this poetry, preoccupation with its ideas is only natural. (Idea is used here in its common sense of an abstract assertion that is formulated by means of a *gist* or summary.) Some of Stevens' ideas resemble familiar philosophical concepts like Bergson's constant novelty of phenomena, or William James' emerging reality, or Santayana's essences. But even then they are not developed as arguments but are given unsupported, as though they existed in simple immediacy without need of mediation. When detached from its language and approximated in a summary, an idea from a poem of Stevens may emerge as only a slight hypothesis vanishing almost while spoken. Even when most solid and formulated, his abstract statements never appear to be valuable intrinsically as profundities or discoveries, and yet the poetry often uses them as an intrinsic part of its own freshness and permanence and abundance.

* Frank Doggett lives in Atlantic Beach, Florida. Other articles of his on Stevens have recently appeared in the *New England Quarterly* and *ELH*. He is at present working on a book length study of the poetry of Stevens.

Stevens plainly did not intend insignificance for his ideas. He maintained that "a poem in which the poet has chosen for his subject a philosophic theme should result in the poem of poems,"¹ but he also categorically stated that he was not interested in employing poetry as a medium for the presentation of a philosophy.² The importance of Stevens' ideas lies in their poetic rather than their philosophic significance. A great many of his poems give an idea as an insight into the nature of the relationship of mind and reality, presented as an intuition that is both gnomic and intelligible. As the majority of these "philosophic themes" are based on assumptions about the nature of one's consciousness of reality, a sketch of the consistent elements in his own sense of experience is an important preliminary to an investigation of the nature of these themes and of their poetic significance.

The world of Stevens' poetry reflects the changes of the flux of experience. The common reality in poetry is usually a static reality like that of an infinite canvas already painted before its impossible beginning. This reality becomes in his poetry a reality burgeoning in the flow of consciousness and created continually in his awareness of it. Stevens finds the actual an intermutation of outer reality and the life within, and knows it through an interpretation of the indeterminate course of perception that interpretation itself alters. The conventional implicit concept of the work of the artist assumes that he is a mere observer of reality and this concept is taken from the point of view of one looking out of the self at a world external to it, as though men stood behind their eyes like watchers behind windows. Stevens' mind is both participant and spectator, creator and observer of the movement and variety of reality. Thus he distrusts set facts and finds the ultimate in the tentative. He uses the attributes of objects as indicating a state of consciousness, the "seeming" of the world of that occasion.

The sun is an example. What it seems
It is and in such seeming all things are.³

Many poets name and assess physical forms and use the value and sense of specific things to give an effect like that of live perception. They try to gain for language the physical qualities of bodies, their solidity, their actuality. Substances, physical objects, for Stevens, are subject to

¹ "A Collect of Philosophy," *Opus Posthumous*, ed. Samuel French Morse (New York, 1957), p. 187; subsequently referred to as O.P. and *The Collected Poems* (New York, 1955) as C.P.

² O.P., p. 187.

³ C.P., p. 339.

the transformations of the flow of consciousness, and are known in all its changing lights, its movement of values, attitudes, pre-conceptions, purposes. Thus forms and objects have a use beyond their mere identity as, for instance, to embody concepts and express the way the world seems in those situations in which they occur. An appearance of a thing is thus both an indication of the nature of the thing and a reflection of the self of that instant.

The difference that we make in what we see
And our memorials of that difference.⁴

The world is partly a conception, but not completely so. Things truly exist in themselves as well as in conception. The search for reality in its pristine, unhumanized state is the constant and difficult purpose of this poetry. This search can only be realized in intuitive ways and by an intelligence that is poetic rather than logical.

Knowing that the intelligence even when most poetic and intuitive must transform what it apprehends, he gives experience suspended in reflection, caught in consideration of what it is and what it is like. By regarding an experience again and again and from this point of view and that, a likeness that yet is blank, an image without features emerges, an experience of reality in which reality apart from that experience cannot be determined. Finally an idea of this experience that is a whole thing becomes evident, and, like an event discovered in the memory, "The bright obvious stands motionless in cold."

Even from this brief account of his method its essential difference from the method and purpose of philosophic writing is evident. But if Stevens' ideas are not truly philosophic ones, they do bear them a likeness, and the resemblance is more than fortuitous. Stevens uses slight elements indiscriminately from whatever philosophic work he wishes, but for the purposes of his poetry and not for the cognitive value these elements may have in themselves. When a passage of philosophic prose is placed beside a poem of Stevens the similarities and differences emerge, especially when the ideas in both are almost parallel. A passage I should like to use as illustration is by a philosopher who is also a poet, and for that reason the language of the two is closer together. Also it is not a technical passage, and is quoted from a criticism; but still it is a philosophical passage and has the advantage of being almost as self-contained as a poem. Santayana is describing the effect of the intuition of an essence on the self.

⁴C. P., p. 344.

The important point, however, is not how intuition is reached, but that when reached it reveals an essence belonging of itself neither here nor there, but undated and eternal. Such essences are set over against existence everywhere and at all times, and it remains for existence, if it will, to embody their forms or to give attention to them, so that they may become evident to living spirits. And a living spirit finds a great joy in conceiving them, not because they are all beautiful or true, but because in conceiving them it is liberated from the pressure of ulterior things, energizes perfectly, and simply conceives.⁵

“Martial Cadenza”⁶ is an intuition in Santayana’s sense, an intuition of an essence, “undated and eternal,” without time, caught in an integration of experience. Although the word “martial” in the title may refer to the image of the silent armies of the second stanza, it conveys some of the effect of a bravery, a soldierly flourish in the face of oncoming time. For the poem abstracts an evanescence, the present, into an essence that is a permanence, the point of unvarying light of the moment of consciousness like the star that is its image:

Only this evening I saw again low in the sky
The evening star, at the beginning of winter.

Winter and evening in all these poems bear with them their burden of traditional connotations for age and approaching death. But the star is constant. It recurs “as if life came back,” he feels, seeing it shining again. In its recurrence, life recurs:

. . . as if it came back, as if life came back,
Not in a later son, a different daughter, another place,
But as if evening found us young, still young,
Still walking in a present of our own.

In the light shining there an embodiment of an essence occurs and by it the present is transformed into the eternal. As the eternal is a world without time it is like something without being, a reality that is not, either because it is without existence or because it has existence no longer, in the sense that past experiences have no existence (for memory does not constitute an existence of the actual experience):

It was like sudden time in a world without time,

⁵ “Proust on Essences,” in *Essays in Literary Criticism of George Santayana*, ed. Irving Singer (New York, 1956), p. 245.

⁶ C. P., pp. 237-238.

This world, this place, the street in which I was,
Without time: as that which is not has no time,
Is not, or is of what there was . . .

Then he thinks of the world of the past, that world abandoned by time, and, in one of his supreme fictions he realizes the silence of non-being and sees the dead world of past occurrence stilled in absolute vanquishment:

. . . full

Of the silence before the armies, armies without
Either trumpets or drums, the commanders mute, the arms
On the ground, fixed fast in a profound defeat.

With only the wisp of a memory of Matthew Arnold's ignorant armies, or even of Keats' steadfast star, he sees his star again as a form of time itself, with time conceived as that moment in which reality exists, the eternal moment of being, reality in itself and apart from any mere temporary and individual consciousness:

—Itself

Is time, apart from any past, apart
From any future, the ever-living and being,
The ever-breathing and moving, the constant fire.

The star is the constant presence of the present, the moment of an existent reality that is always there,

The vivid thing in the air that never changes,
Though the air change.

He sees it as a central reality, an essence not a symbol, and in his realization he becomes one with that fire. He flashes again as it flashes. Thus by a conjunction of opposites the fragile temporary I is identified with the eternal vivid moment of time, the point of the living present. In that identity the self, the living spirit of Santayana's passage, realizing this essence, "energizes perfectly, and simply conceives."

Only this evening I saw it again,
At the beginning of winter, and I walked and talked
Again, and lived and was again, and breathed again
And moved again and flashed again, time flashed again.

Although Santayana's prose is closer to poetry than is usual for philosophy, and Stevens' poems correspondingly closer to philosophic statement than poetry usually goes, the profound breach between them

becomes plainer by their similarities. The obvious differences between the two, between the direct assertion of mere statement, of the voice speaking straight to the receiving mind, and that of the fictive statement, of the voice speaking in a situation, a condition of a place and a time, "this world, this place, the street in which I was," these differences, enhanced by the different rhythmic effects of the passage of prose and of the poem, are the contrasting appearances of the two; but it is the subterranean root system of human experience of the poem that makes it a burgeoning tree to the simple monument of the prose. For instance, Santayana means to say precisely what he says, but Stevens implies a secret and poignant denial of his conjunction of self and star. The poem expresses his sense of exaltation at the embodiment of the concept of eternity as the moment of living experience. That is what he says, openly and longingly. But there to deny the union of the self and the image of eternity are his silent, defeated armies, instances of that mortal world with which his poem must cope.

We face here an instance of the intricate function of the fictive element in poetry. The fictive element in a philosophic passage consists of no more than the occasion of its utterance. But for the poem there is not only the presence of an implied and often intense human situation, but the purposes of the poem itself are fulfilled in its fictive character. The fictive aspect of poetry invades the normally simple and candid nature that a plain statement of an idea usually has. The ideas in Stevens' poems participate in the fictive character of the poem, especially in that they give the whole poem the guise of a moment of insight or realization, or of an affirmation of belief. These ideas avoid the question of their truth-value by their participation in the fictive.

It is important to remember that a statement cannot avoid a source of some kind for its words, an uttering voice with some sort of an occasion, even for an abstract statement. Stevens' ideas are enveloped by the inevitable circumstances of language, the voice and its situation. Therefore what we have is either more or less of a fictive action. The action can be fairly overt, as in "Martial Cadenza," where the speaker is in a specific place, in his street, with the conflict of his mortality and his yearning for permanence, or the poem may hold no more than the elemental vestigial situation, the instance of utterance. A philosophic idea seems to hold aloof from the vestigial situation of a philosophic passage, and a poetic idea to engage in that situation, in fact to amplify it. In a great many of Stevens' poems his ideas, like the slight

action usual in most lyrics, provide a surface for immediate attention and give the poem a guise or a role to perform. This guise for Stevens is that of an intuition of reality, and thus idea carries on for him a function for the whole poem that resembles the function of an action in a poem with a dominant dramatic character. His poetic ideas engage us in a semblance of an experience that is specific in character and expresses a certain individual sense of the world. And that is what, when abstracted for purposes of study, they mainly seem to do. The abstraction of ideas from poetry is an awkward but useful critical device that gives only a rough approximation of the cognitive material. Getting at this abstract content as best we can, in time it shows itself as a means of approaching experiences in living, for Stevens uses his ideas almost as another poet would use a dramatic content. In this way Stevens' use of idea often inverts the usual relationship of experience and idea in a poem. We are accustomed to poems in which a fiction, an invented situation or a particular mode of action, becomes a representation of an abstraction, by standing as symbolic of an idea, or as part and instance of a universal. Thus the specified thing or event, transformed by implication, is turned into a general conception. Stevens' poems are often made of this traditional experience-into-cognition arrangement; but just as often he reverses it with an arrangement of idea-into-experience.

Any idea, the transforming idea of a poem or the literal idea of expository prose, bears as an inherent flaw the difficulty of its acceptance by a reader.⁷ We accept an action as performing the functions of the fictive and do not demand historicity of it in the way that we demand verity of an idea. But an idea in a poem is inextricably mingled with the human situation in which it exists and in which it is imagined. By no means however does the fictive element impugn the poet's sincerity. And yet it would be naïve to abstract an idea from a poem and ask if the poet believe in it or not. First of all, an idea thus abstracted from a poem is a critic's hypothesis and never identical with the idea in the poem. Ideas are truly offered only according to their use and presentation in the poem, and by this particular presentation the poet defines his position in relation to these ideas. When the ideas of a poem are presented as though they had truth-value and not as the mere expression of a role, the poem has the effect of a personal affirmation.

⁷ In this discussion I have consciously avoided considering the idea of poetry as doctrine and entering the endless controversy over personal opinion and belief in regard to these ideas.

Unlike a philosophic statement the truth-value of an affirmation in poetry does not require a logical justification, but depends on elements that gain simple and universal acceptance like those that are an abstraction of evident and common human experience.

Here I should repeat that Stevens himself insists on the value of his ideas. But he also insists that this truth-value exists only in the insights of the poem. "It would be fantastic to suggest that the overt meaning, what the poem seems to say, contributes little to the artistic significance and merit of a poem. We merely protest against the abstraction of this content from the whole and appraisement of it by other than aesthetic standards. The 'something said' is important but it is important for the poem only insofar as the saying of that particular something in a special way is a revelation of reality."⁸ This is the kind of truth-value that an idea in a poem by Stevens normally has, intuitive and revelatory, rather than practical and applicable beyond the context. His realizations, or "revelations of reality" as Stevens calls them, embody experience as though the idea created special circumstances in which the world could be known, but only in a certain way and according to the terms of the idea itself.

The idea of "On the Road Home"⁹ has such a function. Its contrast of the old philosophic pair, the one and the many, is no more than a simple rejection of one and vindication of the other in terms of a new realization of living.

It was when I said,
"There is no such thing as the truth,"
That the grapes seemed fatter.
The fox ran out of his hole.

This is that fox who, now turned pluralist, finds the grapes no longer sour. But the Truth, that most fabulous of ideas: wasn't it this same bare unrealized thought that Keats found one with beauty, thereby conjoining the ultimate in abstraction with the ultimate in experience?

You . . . You said,
"There are many truths,
But they are not parts of a truth."

Whoever the "you" may have been, William James, writing in *Pragmatism* about the Truth, saw it dissolved into the pluralism of the specific items of the moment of consciousness.

⁸ "On Poetic Truth," O.P., p. 237.

⁹ C.P., pp. 203-204.

"For pluralistic pragmatism, truth grows up inside of all the finite experiences. They lean on each other, but the whole of them, if such a whole there be, leans on nothing. All 'homes' are in finite experience; finite experience as such is homeless. Nothing outside of the flux secures the issue of it. It can hope salvation only from its own intrinsic promises and potencies."¹⁰ "On the Road Home" (the title of Stevens' poem) the poet says he learned that pluralism creates a reality in flux and man standing in that flux stands alone:

Then the tree, at night, began to change,
Smoking through green and smoking blue.
We were two figures in a wood.
We said we stood alone.

Introducing Truth as an almost sacred idea to monists, even as an idol enshrined, William James finds it a mere form of speech unlike the pluralism that he conceives as made up of the particulars of consciousness. "What hardens the heart of everyone I approach with the view of truth sketched in my last lecture" (truth as relation among the details of experience) "is that typical idol of the tribe, the notion of *the Truth*, conceived as the one answer, determinate and complete, to the one fixed enigma which the world is believed to propound."¹¹ And again he says, "The Truth: what a perfect idol of the rationalistic mind!" Stevens, too, finds *the Truth* falsely enshrined; and finding reality in the idea of pluralism, like a poet but unlike a philosopher, he turns it into a way of taking the world, and thus his idea is transmuted into experience:

It was when you said,
"The idols have seen lots of poverty,
Snakes and gold and lice,
But not the truth";

It was at that time, that the silence was largest
And longest, the night was roundest,
The fragrance of the autumn warmest,
Closest and strongest.

Although there is some appearance of a source for Stevens' poem in "Pragmatism and Humanism," from which these passages by James are extracted, conjunction of the poetry and prose is made in order to

¹⁰ *Pragmatism* (New York, 1955), p. 169.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

exhibit the different functions of the same idea in each. James' discussion is a contributing one, for he goes on to show that pragmatism is pluralistic; he raises this old dispute to define the position of pragmatism and to oppose the position of rationalism. But Stevens, using the same dispute, takes his pluralism as a way of seeing the world. He does not reinforce any larger theory of pragmatism or of anything else. Pluralism is an intuition of reality in Stevens' poem. The abstract element becomes the poet's means of certain realizations. To turn to the poem's last two stanzas, silence for Stevens has implications of non-being and of a universe indifferent to man, and it was at that moment of grasping plurality and seeing the idols, in association with immediate human experience and not with rationalistic Truth, that this silence becomes "largest and longest." And in contrast with that silence he enters intensely his own immediate sense of the round night and the warm fragrant autumn. The idea has transformed his experience.

Obviously the ideas of a philosophic passage tend towards concatenation. Stevens' ideas are independent realizations even when the poem is only a part of a larger composition. Also, the special qualities of language of the prose are of minor importance. Stevens' ideas live only in the specific conditions of language and feeling of the poem. Thus the poem has an incantatory quality in that it is, as he says, "the saying of a particular something in a special way." The incantatory element in his poetry contributes to its revelatory or intuitive character, a conscious one as the phrase "revelation of reality" indicates.

"If I am right," he says later in the same essay, "On Poetic Truth," ¹² "the essence of art is insight of a special kind into reality." And then he adds, "A poem would be nothing without some meaning. The truth is that meaning is an awareness and a communication."

It is in awareness which is the very nature of this meaning, rather than in communication which is only its effect, that we find a basis for Stevens' reliance upon abstraction, and upon statement, the normal sentence form of exposition. A basic fact about awareness and statement is that statement is an embodiment in a language form of the subject-object relationship that constitutes awareness. There is the self and this particular of reality that it attends, the self and the not-self; and then there is the subject-verb-object of statement, with the verb substituting for the intent of attention and the way the self attends the not-self. If idea finds its normal conformation in statement, Stevens' ideas are a version of the act of direct awareness, in which the self

¹² O.P., p. 238.

focuses upon the object; not its desire, for that would be to reshape the object into an image of the self; but its intuition, that kind of awareness that subdues the nature of the self to the nature of the object. Stevens indicates that his poems aspire to this awareness in his note, "On Poetic Truth."

"To know facts as facts in the ordinary way has, indeed, no particular power or worth. But a quickening of our awareness of the irrevocability by which a thing is what it is, has such power, and it is, I believe, the very soul of art."¹³ This intuition of the real, freed of the distortion of the human vision of it, Stevens seeks again and again through the abstractions of his poetry, where he hopes to gain the mediation of his angel of reality and hear it say:

. . . in my sight, you see the earth again,
 Cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set,
 And, in my hearing, you hear its tragic drone
 Rise liquidly in liquid lingering,
 Like watery words awash; like meanings said

By repetitions of half-meanings.¹⁴

This intuition of a poem of Stevens, then, is both an outward and an inward regard. It is a realization by the self of an object that "irrevocably is what it is" and is known "cleared of its stiff and stubborn, man-locked set"; and yet this very regard is inevitably the poet's personal expression, existing only in the individual verbal form of the poem. For one of Stevens' generation and interests it would be difficult to speak of intuition without some attention to the emphasis on intuition in philosophy of the turn of the century. Croce and Bergson would certainly come to mind. The poems of Stevens remind us of the intuition of Bergson in that many of these poems are an insight into an aspect of reality by the self, an intuition of an object by a subject; and they remind us of Croce in that they are, too, an expression of that unique self, and represent the poet's sense of the world in his own individual language form. Thus inasmuch as a poem of Stevens is composition as realization it is a Bergsonian intuition, and becomes at the same time a Crocean intuition in that it is composition as expression. Obviously, any poem may be an intuition according to Croce's meaning; the Bergsonian sense of the term is more restrictive. Stevens conceives poetry to be intuitive according to both

¹³ O. P., p. 237.

¹⁴ C. P., pp. 496-497.

interpretations of the word, as can be seen in the passages already quoted here.

However it would be a mistake to look to Bergson or Croce or Santayana or anyone else for a specific source here. Stevens does not go into the matter enough to make a search for the philosophical affinities worthwhile. In fact he never goes into any of his ideas, especially the ideas in his poems, far enough to relate him other than as an eclectic reader. These ideas of his have other purposes than philosophic ones and are really only half ideas after all, and Stevens in his poetic wisdom never made them more.

The secret of the effect of these ideas is their lack of elaboration. Stevens' usual plan for cognition in a poem is to use an abstraction as an overall expository scheme and then within that scheme to move from one idea to another, these contained ideas being almost discrete and used to support the emotional implications of the major idea rather than its abstract import. In other words, his subsidiary ideas do not elaborate the overall idea; they elaborate its emotional implications. Stevens is too knowing a poet to subject his poems to an overwhelming cognitive content. What appears to be an elaboration of an idea may only be the repetition of its slight meaning.

To show Stevens' ideas as only "meanings said / By repetitions of half-meanings" I will use again a poem and a passage of philosophy in juxtaposition. The two contexts have such similar ideas that one could almost be used to explain the other.

There is a dramatic passage in Francis Herbert Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*, a turning point in his argument, in that, after denying that objective aspects of phenomena are reality, and showing the contents of existence conceived objectively as no more than appearance, after almost 150 pages of this denial, all disputed with an air of innocent but utter bafflement, he suddenly affirms his belief that reality is made of feeling and experience.

I will state the case briefly thus. Find any piece of existence, take up anything that anyone could possibly call a fact, or could in any sense assert to have being, and then judge if it does not consist in sentient experience. Try to discover any sense in which you can still continue to speak of it, when all perception and feeling have been removed; or point out any fragment of its matter, any aspect of its being, which is not derived from and is still not relative to this source. When the experiment is made strictly, I can myself conceive of nothing else than the experienced. Anything in no sense felt or per-

ceived is to me quite unmeaning. And as I cannot try to think of it without realizing either that I am thinking of it against my will as being experienced, I am driven to the conclusion that for me experience is the same as reality.¹⁵

Remember from this passage that anything, any piece of existence, even a fact, must consist of sentient experience, that the existent cannot exist without perception and feeling, that "experience is the same as reality," and then turn to Part II of Stevens' "Holiday in Reality":¹⁶

The flowering Judas grows from the belly or not at all.
 The breast is covered with violets. It is a green leaf.

Spring is umbilical or else it is not spring.
 Spring is the truth of spring or nothing, a waste, a fake.

These trees and their argentines, their dark-spiced branches,
 Grow out of the spirit or they are fantastic dust.

The bud of the apple is desire, the down-falling gold,
 The catbird's gobble in the morning half-awake--

These are real only if I make them so. Whistle
 For me, grow green for me and, as you whistle and grow green,
 Intangible arrows quiver and stick in the skin
 And I taste at the root of the tongue the unreal of what is real.

The obvious thing about these two quotations is what was mentioned before in relation to James and Stevens. Bradley's is a small part of a long work with a remarkable continuity and unity, and the idea of his passage quoted above is only a fragment of his elaborate abstract structure. He qualifies and defines this element of his thinking, building to

¹⁵ *Appearance and Reality*, 2nd edition (London, 1908), p. 145. While on the subject of Stevens and Bradley it is interesting to turn to "Esthétique Du Mal XV," and compare Stevens' rejection there of a non-physical paradise for the reality of sentient physical life and experience with Bradley's rejection of the concept of the physical world of scientific materialism for the sentient reality of his metaphysics (*ibid.*, pp. 490-491). By his "skeleton of primary qualities" in the quotation to follow Bradley means "a strictly physical explanation of the Universe." Physical, for Bradley excludes mind, and he presents the materialism of the scientist as an unreal abstraction of primary qualities. "On one side is set up the essence = the final reality—in the shape of a bare skeleton of primary qualities; on the other side remains the boundless profusion of life which everywhere opens endlessly before our view."

¹⁶ C. P. pp. 312-313.

it and beyond it his intricate argument. Taken alone it would have strong implications for Bradley's thought, implications that he hastens to correct, such as its suggestion of solipsism. And all its implications are cognitive ones.

Stevens' passage is a whole poem, a complete integer. The first part of "Holiday in Reality" (not quoted here) is, in fact, another separate poem, with a separate idea. Stevens takes this bare concept, the identity of reality and experience, and makes his poem out of its repetition. His expression of his idea is a paean of amazement almost, an utterance with a certain feeling and manner, intent upon the way this idea seems and the way reality seems in this idea. It is certainly not a prayer, but it does have some qualities of reverence. It has implications but they are implications of feeling rather than of cognition. These implications pertain to a certain quality of being and particular forms of experience. The cognitive and logical implications of this fragment of idea are of no consequence in the poem. To pursue them would be to leave the poem for one's own speculation.

What we have in Stevens' poem is an idea that, in its own proper native language, functions as a vehicle of particular experience itself. With "I taste at the root of the tongue the unreal of what is real," Stevens is giving the intuition of his poetry, not an intuition of a particular thing but a particular intuition, and one of that reality that is indistinguishably both mind and world.

In the common sense, intuition leans towards an apperception of specifics and away from abstract concepts; but the intuition in Stevens' poetry is an idea that gives a particular sense of the world and its specifics are those of a certain integration of experience. Although this integration is gained through an abstraction, even one that is only the slightest kind of an idea, yet it contains something of the drama of being and of a specific existence. It does not have to contain a listing of specifics, an itemization of single certain forms or even of single certain moments. It itself is a single certain experience.

As a matter of fact the specific items and specific images in Stevens' poem are generic ones: the flowering Judas is any flowering Judas, the breast and its violets are any breast and its violets. More than that, these generic images are transformed into larger abstractions, and the breast and its violets become sentience and its created reality. Thus, even while grasping for their specificity, these apparent items expand into vast and simple abstractions. The one most particular thing here is the individual experience, the "I taste at the root of the tongue."

And then what is it that is tasted there but the whole unbounded content of experience?

And this brings us to the general question of the abstract and the specific style. Wimsatt's fine study, *The Substantive Level*, has made the important points in regard to this topic, but some brief definition should be made here, because of a tendency in much criticism of Stevens to say that (except for *Harmonium*) his poetry is too generalized, containing meaning but devoid of significances, lacking the excitement of the specific. And thus his later books, including *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, surely one of the books that is a fulfillment of our age, like *Four Quartets* or *The Tower*, receive perfunctory approbation and scant discussion.

The idea of a specific style is derived from an attempt to present substantives in imitation of objects perceived in an actual situation. The imitation is given by the devices that seem to provide recognition (like a sign of an object that would identify it if no more than glimpsed). The desire for the specific seems to be a desire to find the elements of experience in separate successive integers. A tendency towards the specific is natural to the narrative or dramatic (although not essential) because identification is one way of giving a sense of situation. Although situation is never absent from a poem it becomes less of a central feature when idea development is stressed rather than person and event. In poems that emphasize situation, imagery giving an illusion of perception gives also the illusion of the specific. Of course, because the specific in a context is removed from actual experience, it really is always the abstract. Therefore we have no true specific in language, but only degrees and kinds of abstraction. As Stevens maintains, "It must be abstract."

Wallace Stevens' Emperor

THE EMPEROR OF ICE-CREAM

Call the roller of big cigars,
The muscular one, and bid him whip
In kitchen cups concupiscent curds.
Let the wenches dawdle in such dress
As they are used to wear, and let the boys
Bring flowers in last month's newspapers.
Let be be finale of seem.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Take from the dresser of deal,
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
On which she embroidered fantails once
And spread it so as to cover her face.
If her horny feet protrude, they come
To show how cold she is, and dumb.
Let the lamp affix its beam.
The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream.

Perhaps because of its intrinsic worth, perhaps because of the challenge it offers, Stevens' short poem, "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," has received extensive criticism and many conflicting interpretations.. The diversity of opinion seems to support William Van O'Connor's assertion that it is "reputedly one of his [Stevens'] most obscure poems."¹ On the whole, critics agree that the poem deals with life, especially in the first stanza, and with death, particularly in the second. They differ, however, when they try to explain precisely what Stevens is saying about life and death. To Richard Ellmann, the poem exhibits the right

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¹ William Van O'Connor, *The Shaping Spirit* (Chicago, 1950), p. 109.

way to conduct a funeral;² and R. P. Blackmur supports him by alleging that "the poem might be called Directions for a Funeral, with Two Epitaphs."³ O'Connor, on the other hand, states that the poem "exhibits the relationship between illusion and things-as-they-are," and that it reveals that "life is change or flux, a shifting from illusion to reality; from delight and enjoyment . . . to difficult experiences [i. e., death]. We should accept it as such."⁴ A third position is represented by Kenneth Lash who claims that the subject of the poem is "the reality of the tawdry and the commonplace."⁵ These statements indicate a great divergence of opinion on the general meaning. But a greater lack of unanimity is found in the interpretations of key words and images, and makes clear the need for following Blackmur's advice: "you have only to know the meanings of the words and to submit to the conditions of the poem."⁶ And because irony and satire are critical aspects of "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," the second requirement, a submission to the conditions of the poem, is especially relevant.

As we see it, "The Emperor of Ice-Cream" works through a series of sharp, compact images to satirize the ruler of a people whose values are ill-defined. It is an oblique but trenchant exposé of an emperor whose dicta are devoid of wisdom, an emperor whose authority derives from the fact that his subjects lack definite goals and consequently have fallen into futility. Their gods are lost or dead, and they have placed their faith in a monarch whose throne is transient and negligible, as stable as ice cream.

To arrive at this broad meaning, the reader must answer three fundamental questions which, though they do not in themselves lead to a complete explication of the poem, are essential preliminaries to a full understanding of it. (1) Who, actually, is issuing the commands—"call," "bid," "let," "take," "spread"? (2) What is the speaker's attitude toward those addressed? And (3) what is the poet's attitude—presumably the attitude the reader should take—toward the speaker?

To answer the first query—that an emperor is involved at all is sug-

² Richard Ellmann, "Wallace Stevens' Ice-Cream," *The Kenyon Review*, XIX (Winter, 1957), 92.

³ R. P. Blackmur, "Examples of Wallace Stevens," *Form and Value in Modern Poetry* (New York, 1957), p. 190.

⁴ O'Connor, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110.

⁵ Kenneth Lash, "Stevens' *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*," *Explicator*, VI (April, 1948), No. 6.

⁶ Blackmur, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

gested by the occurrence of the word "emperor" five times. That the emperor himself, or at least some official representative, is promulgating the orders is suggested by the imperative mood of the verbs and by the imperial, thoroughly cavalier tone. It is appropriate for a ruler to command and to issue proclamations. In the light of this evidence, the emperor should be regarded as a *persona* speaking in his own behalf.

Concerning the second question—his attitude toward his subjects—the emperor seems to exhibit a disrespect, if not a contempt, for them. He feels that he can satisfy them with a second-rate way of life, that he can arbitrarily make arrangements for them, knowing that the philosophy he prescribes is narrow and unenlightened. To maintain his supremacy he must try to keep them in the dark so that they do not even catch a glimpse of another ruler who might conceivably displace him. His belittling estimate of his subjects renders his reign basically immoral.

As for the third question—the poet's attitude toward the speaker—the poet fashions two possible points of view from which the reader may regard the emperor's utterances: one permits the reader to see the emperor's intended meaning, and the other, of which the emperor is ignorant, permits the reader to see the emperor's statements through the poet's eyes. This second way of understanding the lines reveals the poet's attitude toward the emperor. By establishing a deliberate ambiguity, the poet is able to mock the emperor's affirmation that he is the source and measure of all things. While the emperor delivers the *lex loci*, the poet simultaneously intimates that the royal declarations are perverted. Rather than rebut the emperor's assertions directly, Stevens reduces them to absurdity by ironic intonation.

And this form of refutation is effective, for it is the ambiguity which not only shakes the emperor's position but also gives the poem real tension. The poet implicitly denies that the activities of the dead woman's acquaintances are adequate expressions of mourning. The poet and the emperor are not in accord at all; they are pulling for opposite ends. Stevens has included no direct statement of his own ideal, but, of course, he is not required to. He challenges the sceptre of the ice-cream kingdom, but does not raise his own—at least not very high.

Superficially, the poem presents a dramatic scene in which preparations for a wake are made. An authoritative voice commands a dead woman's acquaintances to pay some tawdry tribute to her memory; and the speaker takes advantage of the opportunity offered by the

wake to proclaim the attitude toward life and death which is proper—proper, that is, in this particular kingdom. He exhorts his hearers to recognize that any elaborate mourning over a corpse is wasteful, that any significant departure from their usual way of life is to be avoided. The sequel to death must be a keener desire for ice-cream living. Strangely unconventional, then, is the homage he orders for the dead woman (not that Stevens would condemn him for this reason).

To recapitulate, the reader must understand the emperor's doctrine, must be conscious of the cynicism in his disparagement of his subjects' capabilities, and also must perceive the poet's mockery of the values asserted by the emperor. The reader must be sensitive to the tone, to the implications, and to the significance of the patterns of images. Each image operates in contexts which determine its final meaning, often to the extent of altering it radically from an apparent and superficial meaning. The result is an irony within an irony.

Especially in satire, because the frequent result is a ludicrous anti-climax, the juxtaposition of clashing images is a common technique. Here an incongruity is striking in the very title, "The Emperor of Ice-Cream." It calls attention to the triviality of the empire, to the childishness of the emperor—a sly way of denigrating him—and also contrasts with the grimness of the scenes depicted, especially that in the second stanza. This "oddity of association,"⁷ in Blackmur's phrase, in both the images and in the larger scenes and actions, causes the reader to suspect that something is wrong. After this mode of expression has been repeated many times, the reader associates the dis-harmony of the imagery with the emperor himself and with his code. As a result, the reader is ready to refuse the philosophy linked with this pairing of incongruous pictures.

Incongruities of this kind are so frequent that they constitute the predominating pattern of expression. In the first six lines, for instance, the burly fellow and the sensual wenches and the boys are all required to perform tasks which fail to utilize their full potentialities.

The muscular man is summoned first. As a result of the specific reference to his strength and the suggestion that he is prone to roll large cigars from side to side in his ponderous mouth, the expectation is that some task commensurate with his muscularity will be performed.⁸ He is assigned, however, merely the trivial job of applying

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁸ The alternative explanation that the man is a maker of cigars, a worker who rolls tobacco leaves into cigars, is possible but less likely. Cf. Robert Thacka-

his strength to "kitchen cups," a disappointing, even comic, chore. What is more, this fellow is directed to "whip" the curds, not merely to stir them. Although "whip" is idiomatic for the process of beating the curds, the connotation of the word implies more exertion than is needed or, for that matter, than is feasible in a cup. Furthermore, the collocation of the cook's muscularity and the idea of whipping leads one to expect violent action. But when this expectation is abruptly followed by "kitchen cups," the incongruity is startling.

The product of his efforts, the "concupiscent curds," likewise disappoints the reader. In spite of the various explications offered by commentators, the perfectly obvious and literal meaning of "curds" seems to be quite suitable.⁹ He is to make curds, the curds obtained from sour milk. These curds may be eaten, indeed rather frequently are, though to some palates they would prove to be insipid. In appearance, they are much like ice cream, and they are, like ice cream, a milk product. In spite of these resemblances, curds are a feeble substitute for ice cream; and, in accordance with his depreciatory appraisal of his subjects, the emperor is attempting to foist a second-rate dish on them. The adjective "concupiscent" obviously modifies "curds," but it is difficult to understand how the meaning of "lustful" or "desirous" applies to this inanimate substance. The reader is eventually forced to apply "concupiscent," not to the curds themselves, but to the attitude of the wenches and boys toward the food: they are to lust, or so the emperor bids them, for this tasteless, pale dessert. The emperor's disparagement of his people is patent. But even if O'Connor's equally plausible reading (in which the adjective must refer to the effect produced) is adopted, that "concupiscent curds" "suggests drinks that arouse physical desires," the emperor's feeling is still apparent.¹⁰ His supposition that the wenches and boys are physically deficient and require artificial stimulation degrades them every bit as much as his offer of an insipid dessert.

Just as there is a disparity between the cigar-smoker's prescribed

berry ("Stevens' *The Emperor of Ice-Cream*," *Explicator*, VI, April, 1948, No. 6), who comes to the opposite conclusion. But even if he is taken to be a maker of cigars, there is the same disproportion in the application of such pronounced muscularity to the delicate operation of manufacturing cigars.

⁹ According to George K. Anderson and Eda Lou Walton, *This Generation* (Chicago, 1939), p. 342 (notes), the man whips up "lustfully appetizing drinks"; according to Blackmur, *op. cit.*, p. 190, he is whipping up "desirable desserts"; and according to Ellmann, *op. cit.*, p. 93, it is "ice-cream."

¹⁰ O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

activities and the requirements of his job, so there is a disparity between the ice-cream and the curds. By contrasting what is naturally looked for and what is actually seen, the poet alerts the reader to the emperor's disrespect for his subjects. That disrespect, in turn, is a manifestation of his crassness, a characteristic which justifies the poet's disdain for him.

The next three lines are concerned with the persons to be invited to the wake. That "wenches" are summoned and not ladies or young women suggests that there is something slightly disreputable about the gathering, as the emperor envisions it at any rate. In addition, the term "wenches" is a reminder of the emperor's superiority; the pejorative note in the word cannot be overlooked. His term conveys also a down-to-earth quality and an expectation of more vigorous action, more riotous living, than is connoted by the word "dawdle." "Dawdle" does, it is true, carry overtones of sensuality—not mere laziness and inaction but sexually inviting behavior. Nevertheless, the anti-climax is unavoidable, mild as it may be, in this languid and half-hearted observance which the ruler plans.

Incidentally, it is not certain at this point that there is to be a wake. As a matter of fact, until the entire poem has been read, many clues to the meaning of individual lines are lacking; the second stanza is necessary for a full understanding of the first. The mounting suspense (perhaps bewilderment would be more accurate) carries the reader along and, by forcing him to reconsider verses already read in the light of the new information he gradually acquires, helps to unify the two stanzas. Not until the word "face" is reached in the fourth line of the second stanza can the reader reasonably conclude that a dead woman is the provocation of all the activity. And not before the word "cold" in the sixth line is this confirmed.

Generally speaking, the same sort of comment that was made about the people can be made concerning their clothing. There is no formal, elaborate garb, funeral or otherwise—another disappointment, assuming that this is to be a festive occasion. Moreover, merely the "boys" are invited. Once more, a mild shock is experienced because of the connotations of the term. Either the speaker is still looking down his nose at the people or "boys" is used to convey a hint of the youths' callowness—probably both. These fellows are told to bring flowers. For whom? Conceivably their gift is for the wake (this is the first impression) but more likely, in this particular case, the flowers are for the wenches: normally one does not carry flowers to a wake, but one

might present a wrapped bouquet to a girl. Supposedly fresh and bright, the flowers contrast sharply with the deadness of the month-old newspapers, underlining again the failure of all parts of the scene to live up to their promise. Is the poet, then, asking the reader to regard these festivities as a sort of hedonist's delight? As a supreme good to be diligently sought after? It hardly seems possible. Undoubtedly, this will turn out to be a very drab celebration indeed. And Stevens has given ample evidence to permit the reader to see through the emperor's hypocrisy—the emperor, of course, feels that second-rate though it is, it is good enough for these people.

This undercutting of all vitality and halving of everyone's potentialities ultimately expose the emperor. His values are shortsighted as well as hedonistic. And when he aphoristically says, "Let be be finale of seem," he explicitly affirms that his commands express, in his opinion, the proper and reasonable attitude toward death, toward the corpse now cold and corrupting in the next room: death ("seem") is unpleasant; let us ignore it and devote ourselves to physical joys ("be"). The extent to which he recognizes the fatuity of his own edicts may be problematical, but obviously, for him, death is primarily a reminder that life continues. The dead are gone, but the living remain; and their overriding duty is to life lived with bacchanalian fervor, not to death with its useless cries of *miserere*. That is the emperor's doctrine. The reader, however, having been given sufficient grounds to distrust him, does not agree with his precepts; in fact, largely as a result of a recognition of his basic inanity and double-dealing, the reader rejects them.

And the refrain, "The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream," reiterates this notion: the only emperor, the only reality, is the emperor of the realm of ice-cream, the land of sensual enjoyment in life. With this slogan, analogous to a politician's chant, he attempts to spellbind his subjects and win them through mob psychology; this subterfuge reveals the emperor's doubts about his own philosophy, and serves as a meretricious means of reassuring himself of his absolute sway over his audience. Only if some vague suspicion concerning the existence of another realm lurked in the back of his mind would he find it necessary to overstate his position by insisting that the "only" emperor is the emperor of ice-cream. Unless he envisioned, however dimly, some competition, he would not be driven, like a small boy, to knock down the opposition and elevate himself in order to convince others of his supremacy. At the same time, the reader sees in the refrain an addi-

tional reason for refusing to ally himself with the speaker; not only is the emperor unsure of himself, but his personal coarseness inevitably alienates the reader.

The second stanza continues the imperative mood, presents another series of disparate images, and maintains the dual point of view. Whereas the first stanza revealed the emperor's depreciation of his people and of their capacities for living and led finally to the reader's questioning of his proposals, the second makes graphic the emperor's callous attitude toward death. To some degree, this attitude derives from his low estimate of the living as well as from the notion which he tries to impose upon his subjects that life is supreme. The monarch's grossness is plain, as is the vulgarity of his kingdom. The whole picture is so offensive that the poet need not censure it explicitly to force anyone to reject it: Stevens can rely on an ordinary sense of values to affirm that this emperor and his domain (if the scene presented is their typical product) are not acceptable.

Up to this point, the provocation of all the commands has not been apparent. Now, however, comes the revelation that a dead woman has prompted the emperor's edicts:

Take from the dresser of deal,
Lacking the three glass knobs, that sheet
On which she embroidered fantails once
And spread it so as to cover her face.
If her horny feet protrude, they come
To show how cold she is, and dumb.

It is a crude disclosure which removes any doubt that under this ruler neither life nor death possesses value or nobility. The "dresser of deal" from which the shroud is taken was, even when new, a cheap piece of furniture; but now it has become even worse and is sadly in need of repair. By alluding, as if in an aside, to the three missing knobs, the emperor in effect cites the shabbiness of the dresser as evidence of the woman's unworthiness and, through mere proximity, of the undignified nature of death. Ultimately, however, the poet intimates that even in these shabby circumstances death is not ignoble. As for the sheet so indecorously used, it is no ordinary sheet—this one is decorated with embroidery. Garish and in bad taste when used for a shroud, it is a crucial detail in the poem because the woman had labored over these fantails when alive; now, according to the emperor, they cover her ignominiously in death. This suggests that in the em-

peror's eyes there is a small victory in seeing this sheet, with all its associations of life, covering death, triumphing as it were over his foe. Ironically, this may also be regarded as an unconventional but not inappropriate memento of the dead woman's accomplishments, a reminder that her life was not without its creative attainments. Nevertheless, the emperor's motives for selecting this particular sheet are disrespectful and he must therefore be condemned.

The next few lines show that the sheet is too small to conceal the body, head and foot. Consequently, the emperor orders that the feet remain exposed as more fitting tokens of the present ignoble state of the corpse. And in case the unattractiveness of death might still be overlooked, it is reinforced by allusions to the condition of the exposed feet—far from glamorous, they are “horny”—and to the woman herself who is “cold” and “dumb,” dumb both in the sense of silent and also in the colloquial sense of stupid, the former fitting the fact of death, the latter appropriate to the emperor's general conception of human intelligence. The brutality of this scene is necessarily linked with the emperor who is responsible for it. He had hoped that, visualized in detail, the entire scene of the wake would undermine any romantic ideas concerning the dignity of death. The opposite happens, however, for he is too callous, too shortsighted, too disparaging.

The last two lines of the second stanza correspond to the last two lines of the first stanza. Not only is their placement similar, but the rhymes are the same, both commence with the word “Let,” and the last line itself is repeated verbatim. These parallels strengthen the unity of the poem; and, by making the couplets prominent, stress their meanings. On the surface, the first line of this last couplet asserts that a lamp should be so placed that its light falls upon the dead woman. But, at another level, it expresses the emperor's desire that the light play upon his pronouncements and upon the principles which underlie them so that they may be seen and followed. Understood from a third point of view, the line contains the poet's warning that the code advocated by the emperor must be subjected to a strong light, scrutinized, and then put aside. As before, the last line is an insistent slogan stating the emperor's belief that his doctrines should prevail, that he is supreme; and at the same time it is a demonstration that the emperor protests too much, that his teachings must be examined closely, and, if the reader will allow himself to be guided by the poet's insinuations, rejected.

This proposed reading of the poem may appear to run counter to

Stevens' usual stand against any elaborate celebrations of death in favor of a deliberate devotion to living and life. In "The Death of a Soldier," he writes, "Death is absolute and without memorial." This idea is clearly outside any conventional Christian framework, but it is not inconsistent with the view that life must be lived sanely. The emperor of ice-cream does not preach sanity. Consequently, he should not be identified or even allied with the poet. It is just as wrong to sympathize with the extreme notions of the emperor as with the opposite extremes of the "infants of misanthropes / And the infants of nothingness" in "Cortege for Rosenbloom." Both the emperor and the infants are hypocritical, and, more important in Stevens' view, both are truly unimaginative. Neither one promotes a deep appreciation of life and a mature cultivation of enjoyment. The real finale for each is a lament for the "imagination that we spurned and crave." "The Emperor of Ice-Cream," then, inveighs against superficial living, against "The World without Imagination." Elder Olson correctly writes that Stevens' "bitterness in *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* . . . is based upon . . . his own very real respect [for death]."¹¹ Therefore, although the poem is ultimately a criticism expounding not so much what to believe as what not to believe, its implications are analogous to the more explicit statement in "Sunday Morning":

Death is the mother of beauty; hence from her,
Alone, shall come fulfilment to our dreams
And our desires.

¹¹ Elder Olson, "The Poetry of Wallace Stevens," *The English Journal*, XLIV (April, 1955), 197.

The Return of Auguste Rodin

"... The avant-garde of the 1920's and 30's saw him as an old-fashioned sentimentalist, a figure of fun—poor old man. Yet in recent years the tide has turned and in the perspective of time serious historians of modern art see him as 'the father of modern sculpture.'"¹

"There is no doubt that Rodin... is too important, too creative an artist to be sidetracked by modern taste as, to some extent, he has during the recent past.... It was Rodin's dynamic emotion, in contrast to the barren restraints of the academies, that established the claim of 'father of modern sculpture' which his new proponents have set up for him."²

"Rodin has been under the weather for about a generation. But now that the doctrine of 'pure form' has received several set-backs at the hands of a renewed concern with art as a vehicle of feeling and imagination, the great romantic should again come into his own."³

"... Rodin, for a half century dominant in the world of art but for several decades after his death belittled by most modern sculptors and their enthusiasts as a melodramatic and sentimental romantic who marked the end of the line for realism, has within the last few years begun to be revalued. Now he is even being claimed as an ancestor of the moderns...."⁴

These statements were made in the spring of 1957, the first two on the occasion of an impressive "Rodin and French Sculpture" exhibition at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, the following two in connection with a sculpture show at the newly opened World House Galleries (which, to many a visitor, revealed an amazing kinship between the animated, tension-fraught bronzes by Rodin and—the free-swinging mobiles of our American contemporary, Alexander Calder!)

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¹ Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, *Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, May 1957.

² Carlyle Burrows, *New York Herald Tribune*, April 28, 1957.

³ Stuart Preston, *New York Times*, March 31, 1957.

⁴ Emily Genauer, *New York Herald Tribune*, March 31, 1957.

The Metropolitan Museum owns a large number of Rodins—as early as 1893 the Museum obtained his *Head of Saint John the Baptist*, one of the first Rodins to be exhibited in America. The Museum of Modern Art started its collection in 1929, at a time when Rodin's reputation was very low; in its jubilee volume of 1954, *Masters of Modern Art*, it sadly admitted that it had no sculpture by Rodin, only a water color and two drawings that “because of their revelation of movement and wonderfully spontaneous silhouette” were masterpieces no less than his more ambitious sculptural works. Only a few months after the publication of the book the museum proudly announced that it had acquired for its Sculpture Garden two of his most important bronzes, the *Balzac* and the *St. John the Baptist Preaching*!

We now find it hard to understand how we could have been so unjust to a truly great man like Rodin. But the fact is that we did dismiss him as a creator of gesticulating melodrama, as a victim of his own impressionist passion for light and shade, as one whose conception was pictorial rather than sculptural. We depreciated him because he was “only” a modeler, and because anything but carving—that is to say, direct treatment of material—we considered sinful.

Today, modeling and casting is once again regarded a legitimate sculptural process. Rodin is no longer judged on the basis of his inferior marbles, products of his old age, and none really his own work (impeccably, almost insipidly, smooth and “perfect,” these marbles were cut by artisans after clay models furnished by the master). Today, we can ignore the numerous portrait busts of celebrated or wealthy patrons Rodin, himself a celebrity and a wealthy man, produced in his later years. Obviously some of the work fashioned when he was no longer the experimenter and innovator but had become the untouchable “maître” lacks his fierce vitality and intensity, but the mannerisms of his old age, and those of the numerous would-be Rodins who aped and multiplied his shortcomings, must not blur our pleasure in the images fashioned out of soft, yielding clay by his fingers.

Nobody can ignore the dynamic creations that came from his studio prior to about 1900. With compactness no longer considered an essential quality, and with much of the prejudice against “romantic” sculpture gone, we can enjoy Rodin's own enjoyment of the living forms of nature, particularly the nude human body, to which he devoted himself with unsurpassed sensuous abandon. Suddenly, all schools claim him for themselves, not only the Expressionists, but also the Abstract groups. He is hailed as the one who helped break up the

traditional ideas of continuity of form, as a "baroque" sculptor who paved the way for the post-Cubist Lipchitz, for Henry Moore who might endorse Rodin's statement that sculpture was the art of the lump and the hole. Some of his other statements, such as "I am . . . a mathematician, and my sculpture is good because it is geometrical," or "I feel the cubic truth everywhere—plans and volume appear to me as the laws of all life," are being dug up, and applied to his own works; they are infinitely better suited to his more ambitious mature work than all his humble tribute to Nature as his sole master.

Rodin was basically a modeler—one of the greatest of all times.⁵ The arduous, time-consuming method of cutting directly into wood or stone was unsuitable for the temperamental master who preferred to transfer quickly into clay the spontaneous attitudes struck by his sitters, or to give immediate shape to the images born in his fertile mind. He had professional models disport themselves in his studio so that he could sketch immediately whatever unpremeditated poses might fascinate him—just as his friends, the Impressionist painters, went into the fields and woods with their sketchbooks to reap the ever-changing moods of Nature. In fact, the speedy impressions of Rodin's fingertips in the wax or clay (whose traces are still noticeable in the final bronzes) bear some resemblance to the swift brush-work of the sculptor's friend, the leading Impressionist painter, Claude Monet.⁶

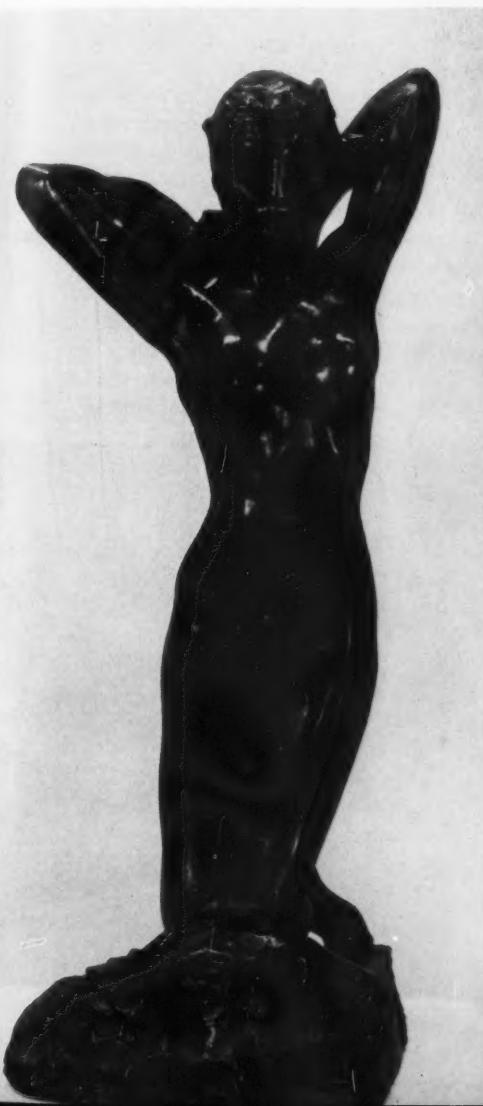
It is not accurate to pigeonhole Rodin as an Impressionist sculptor (as we confess to have done). True, he was thrilled by the play of light over the rippling surfaces of shaped masses, and in an unguarded moment he said to his Boswell, the young literateur, Paul Gsell, that the only principle in Art was to copy what one saw. Yet he was more than just an eye, and his very character would have prevented this searcher and investigator from being a counterfeiter of nature. While it would not have occurred to this deeply religious and basically humble individual to say, with his favorite poet, Baudelaire, that it was an artist's first business to substitute man for nature, and to protest against her, Rodin made it a point to qualify the notion that to be an artist was to be a copyist:

Art is contemplation. . . . It is the joy of the intellect which sees clearly into the Universe and which recreates it, with

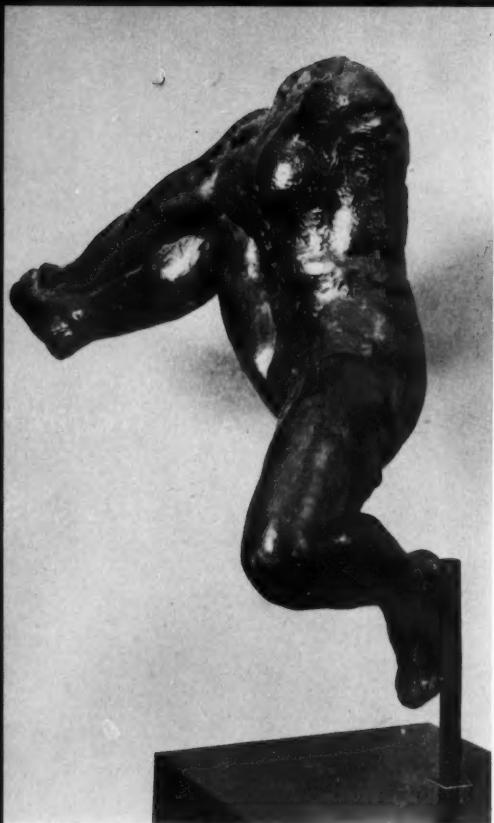
⁵The term "modeling" refers, of course, to the method of shaping a figure in a plastic, malleable material, which is either retained as the end-product, or used as a form for the making of a reproduction in bronze, marble or other media.

"Monument to Balzac" 1897. Presented in memory of Curt Valentin by his friends. Collection of Museum of Modern Art, N. Y., N. Y.

Courtesy of Museum of Modern Art



"La Faunesse." Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, Utica, New York.



"Iris" 1890-91.
Collection of
Joseph H. Hirshhorn

Courtesy of Museum of Modern Art

Courtesy of Museum of Modern Art

(Detail) "St. John the Baptist."
Collection City Art Museum of
Saint Louis.



conscious vision. . . . Art is taste. . . . It is the reflection of the artist's heart upon all the objects that he creates. . . . The resemblance which he [the portraitist] ought to obtain is that of the soul; that alone matters; it is that which the sculptor or painter should seek beneath the mask of features. . . . All [the beauty in art] comes from the thought, the intention which their creators believed they could see in the Universe.*

While he exhibited with Monet, he himself would never have been satisfied to be only a retina, registering fleeting impressions, a mere recorder of the effects of light. With his insistence on solidly constructed forms he was closer to the Post-Impressionists than to Monet who dissolved everything into dazzling atmospheric vibrations. Rodin could never have said, "What I strive most to achieve in art is to make you forget the material," or "Nothing is material in space." These words were uttered by a younger contemporary, Medardo Rosso, the most typical representative of Impressionism in sculpture, the one who substituted the interplay of light and shadow for the interplay of volume and outline.

Rodin is difficult to fit into a category, particularly since his work is spread over a long segment of time, the turbulent era from about 1863 to about 1915. He started out as a Realist, yet in his mature work he anticipated the emotion-fraught Expressionism of a much later date. In his beginnings he was already a revolutionary, for the official art of France under the Second Empire was dedicated to neo-Greek, or rather pseudo-Greek, ideals, to a conventionalized beauty of elegance that was exactly opposite to young Rodin's unconventionally brutal *The Man with the Broken Nose*. The bureaucracy of Art in France found repellent this head of an aging man whose battered features increased the tortured expression of the face, or *The Old Courtesan*, that decrepit bent nude mourning the ruin of her once fair body. It was unusual to discover beauty in the seemingly ugly, and, going further, even to insist that only that which possessed no character was ugly in art (and to remind the public that the emaciated John the Baptist by Donatello, the deformed dwarf by Velasquez, and the old worn-out peasant by Millet were a thousand times more beautiful than the vacant "beauty" manufactured by Beaux-Arts professors).

Rodin angered his more conservative contemporaries by his own version of *John the Baptist*: instead of the immobility, the deathlike

* *L'Art* (Paris, 1911; English trans., Boston, 1912).

repose of post-19th century sculpture, here was shown the act of walking, a majestic movement which, decried as "illegitimate" by French critics, would have delighted an unrestrained genius like Michelangelo. It took the world years to get used to Rodin's unorthodoxy—*vide* the outcry against the *Burghers of Calais*, a group commemorating six citizens who had offered their lives to the King of England to save their besieged city from destruction. Yet the initial comments ranged from "too sordid" to "not heroic enough," because Rodin had dared to portray these six in their different states of mind, from defiance to disillusionment, each convincingly performing his part as to character and situation.

A critic selecting the most outstanding of Rodin's works, may think of the *Burghers*—and reject it. For while each figure is superbly conceived, the group itself seems to lack cohesiveness and unity. But it was the aesthetic merits rather than the faults that caused the controversy, and a six-year battle prior to its installation in the Place de la Poste at Calais. Unfortunately the sculptor did not live to see the public unveiling of what I believe to be his most original, most powerful work, the *Balzac*. Rodin, however impetuous, was always careful and patient when planning and executing a work, and he spent seven years on the *Balzac* before the final version was shown in the Salon. It was greeted with indignation. The Société des Gens, which had commissioned the work, refused to accept it, and the task of making a new statue was given to another man, a now long forgotten academician. It was not before 1939—forty years later and full twenty-two years after his death—that Paris was ready for Rodin's masterwork which now distinguishes the intersection of the Boulevards Raspail and Montparnasse.

But the Parisians of yore might be forgiven for not appreciating what to them appeared as a lumpy heavy mass, topped by an ungainly head. It required a poet to understand the significance of this work, to realize how completely the sculptor had grasped the character of the novelist, as brutally unconventional as the monument itself. The poet was Rainer Maria Rilke, once the master's private secretary, who wrote about it:

He [Rodin] saw a mighty, striding figure that lost all its heaviness in the fall of its ample cloak. The hair bristled from the nape of the powerful neck. And backward against the thick locks leaned the face of a visionary in the intoxication of his dream, a face flashing with creative force: the face

of an element. This was Balzac in the fullness of his productivity, the founder of generations, the waster of fates. This was the man whose eyes were those of a seer, whose visions would have filled the world had it been empty. This was the Balzac that Creation itself had formed to manifest itself and who was Creation's boastfulness, vanity, ecstasy and intoxication. The thrown-back head crowned the summit of this figure as lightly as a ball is upheld by the spray of a fountain. There was no sense of weight, but a magnificent vitality in the free, strong head.⁷

Though Rilke's book tells us much about Rodin's philosophy of art, biographical data are omitted. For those who wish to inform themselves on the enigmatic man who was Rodin there is no dearth of volumes by those who knew him well (or at least believed they did), especially by the indefatigable Judith Cladel,⁸ from whom was concealed neither his insatiable vitality nor his difficult temper.

In a Paris slum on the 12th of November 1840, Rodin was born to a simple, devout clerk in the police department and his equally simple, devout wife. In his seventy-seven years—he died on the 17th of November 1917—there are few dramatic episodes. It is of interest, though, that as a young man, grieved by the death of his sister, he entered a monastery. A discerning priest realized that Auguste's proper place was the studio, and succeeded in turning him back to his true vocation.

Rodin was nearly sixty before the years of poverty, of struggle, ended, and along with the financial rewards came numerous distinctions, including the red ribbon of the Legion of Honor, and the doctorate *honoris causa* given him by Oxford University. He travelled much: to Italy (where he discovered for himself the greatness of Donatello and Michelangelo), to Belgium, to England (where he made a portrait of Bernard Shaw who, he said, had the true head of Christ), even to Prague (where he had a one-man show). He read little, yet was fond of Baudelaire. He loved music, especially Gluck. In the field of art, he was unusually perceptive, for he owned a work of the still unrecognized Van Gogh, and was one of the first to rediscover El Greco, who had long been forgotten. Rodin was deeply impressed by the grandeur of the French cathedrals, and even wrote a book about them.

⁷ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Rodin*. Translated by Jessie Lemont and Hans Trausil (New York 1948).

⁸ Judith Cladel, *Rodin: the Man and his Art*. Translated by S. K. Star (New York, 1917).

From these books we also learn about the patient, constant Rose Beuret, whom he had met when he was a struggling beginner and she an underpaid seamstress, and whose greatest glory it was, after more than fifty years as his mistress, that her old lover consented to making her "Madame Rodin" at last. We learn about some of his frequent and fleeting love affairs, about the galaxy of women who gladly gave themselves to this short, stocky, bullnecked "brute." Yet Rodin was always anxious to return to work and devoted himself to labor with the discipline of the monk he had once wished to become.

Still, with all the "revelations" that have poured in, Hollywood might not even with the help of the most imaginative script writers produce a movie comparable to those based on the lives or legends of his contemporaries, Gauguin, Van Gogh, and Toulouse-Lautrec. We shall be spared a spectacle of "himself" on the screen, but we can foresee that his work will be shown more and more often—the lasting work of a giant unmatched in energy, in creative urge, who gave more to life than he took, using the shapes of men and women as expressions for his emotional drive. Today we know well, and tomorrow we may know even better, with the wisdom gained through distance in time, to distinguish the perishable from the immortal in Rodin's *œuvre*. At this point, it seems that he was at his best when he had gained freedom vis-à-vis nature, the freedom to infuse into his figures the ebullience and exuberance of his passionate soul.

Keats's Timeless Order of Things: A Modern Reading of "Ode to Psyche"

Traditionally we have considered the unifying power of the imagination—so grandiloquently praised by Coleridge—as one of the stocks in trade of the poet. In the twentieth century, however, poets have shown a marked disinclination or inability to synthesize experience into a meaningful whole. Like John Crowe Ransom's equilibrists, they prefer to balance "perilous and beautiful" over the indecisive gulf of physical and metaphysical inconclusiveness. Like Tate's modern man meditating at the graves of the confederate dead and Eliot's modern men brooding over the hollowness of contemporary life, most modern poets appear unable or unwilling to do more than dramatize the measurable and immeasurable worlds of experience as "two painful stars" spinning in mutually exclusive orbits.

If the poet is shirking his traditional role, who then is performing this necessary task of reconciliation? I think one can safely say that the last half century has seen the literary critic assuming the grave responsibility of showing a meaningful relation between the observable facts of a tree and an atom and the non-sensory values of the spirit and the mind. The critic has become the great systematizer in the twentieth century, the man of reason and imagination who bridges the two worlds of matter and spirit.

He has been particularly active in two tasks: (1) in unifying disorganized poetic canons and (2) in correlating poems with contemporary thought.

Systematizers of Keats in the first area of activity—concerned with what Kenneth Burke calls the poet-poem relationship—include C. D. Thorpe, J. M. Murry, E. R. Wasserman, and N. F. Ford. All, in general, present a Keats who is striving poetically through momentary heightenings of the imagination to see in the transitory beauties of this world a confirmation of the eternal truths of an ideal world. Although

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neglected for the most part by these critics, *Ode to Psyche* also conforms to this view of Keats's poetic cosmology. Just as *Ode on a Grecian Urn* celebrates the timeless beauty of art, and *Ode to a Nightingale* the timeless beauty of nature, so *Ode to Psyche* eulogizes the timeless beauty of love. As a relatively early exercise in propounding the philosophical truth of beauty, the address to Psyche was a wise choice, for the Apuleius tale of a girl whose mortal loveliness and earthly passion are transfigured into immutable beauty and immortal love provided Keats with a legendary instance of ideal beauty. In 1817, in the poem "I stood tip-toe upon a little hill," he had reflected upon the joy that must have been felt by the poet who, inspired by the story of Psyche's love for Cupid, first denied the apparent transiency of earthly events and elevated her to the hierarchy of the gods. But, as Keats remarks in an introduction to the early version of *Ode to Psyche* sent to his brother in the letter of 14 February-3 May 1819, the Romans "never worshipped or sacrificed to [Psyche] with any of the ancient fervour." However he is "more orthodox [than] to let a heathen Goddess be so neglected." These sentiments indicate that *Ode to Psyche* expresses a neo-orthodox adoration of the goddess, and thus a modern poetic confirmation of an ancient poetic configuration. In its celebration of Psyche, the goddess, it acknowledges and re-establishes the previous poet's vision of earthly love and beauty as instances, because translatable into the timeless, of immutable truth; and it joyously heralds the transmundane realm so poignantly longed for in the great odes which followed.

In the second area—the poem-audience relationship—the critic is faced with the task of bringing *Ode to Psyche* into rapport with the pressing demands of a specific time and place necessarily unlike those which gave rise to the poem. If it is to have any importance for us other than as a means of momentary "escape" into a make-believe-land, it must have relevance to our needs. Twentieth-century man can, I think, accept *Ode to Psyche* as a parable of his search amid a universe of apparent relativity for a timeless order of things. In Ransom's *The Equilibrists* two lovers are alternately attracted to each other by sexual passion and repulsed by a conflicting spiritual yearning. In *Ode to Psyche* finite love and ideal truth also figure thematically. The first is presented as a passion of the heart, the second as a passion of the imagination. Both are creative. As Keats philosophizes, 22 November 1817, in a letter to Bailey:

I am certain of nothing but of the holiness of the Heart's

affections, and the truth of Imagination—What the Imagination seizes as Beauty must be Truth—whether it existed before or not—for I have the same Idea of all our Passions as of Love they are all in their sublime, creative of essential Beauty.

The passion of the heart—human love with its stages of self-destroying humiliation—transfigures Psyche from a beautiful girl into a lovely divinity. The passion of the imagination—love of truth—is similarly instrumental in leading Keats toward a more inclusive comprehension of life. Only when he goes beyond the tale told by his senses, humbly accepting the imaginative truth that mutable forms and textures are parts of a continuum including immutable essences, does he encompass the dual aspects of a physical and spiritual world. Thus, by ultimately trusting in the imaginative significance of his vision of Psyche, Keats achieves a meaningful synthesis of experience—unlike Ransom's tormented and paralyzed equilibrists who in their ego-oriented positivism are unable to resolve the seeming duality of their yearnings. In the poem the progress of Keats's thought from uncertainty to assurance follows structurally the teleological ordering of experience inherent in the ancient legend: Psyche the insecure mortal lover of Cupid becoming Psyche the feted divine consort of Eros. Although we can no longer accept literally the Psyche myth, we can find in it symbolically a fulfillment of our longing for what ordinary existence alone cannot give. In *Ode to Psyche* we can live Keats's rediscovery of the immutable correspondence between the material and immaterial worlds, because the rediscovery is perfectly reproduced in the architectonics of the poem, and thus derive an aesthetic apprehension of a unified world which the disquieting modern view of Ransom in *The Equilibrists* and Stevens in *Sunday Morning* resolutely bifurcates into a cloying green island set in a “dividing and indifferent blue” sky.

2

The first third of *Ode to Psyche* (lines 1-23) functions as a lesson in the validity of earthly experience. A child is catechized in the fundamental verities of Christianity through the tales of Christ's sojourn on earth as a man. In somewhat the same fashion, Keats comprehends the conceptual truth of the heavenly Psyche through the story of her worldly love for Cupid. He opens the poem, after the completion of the initial perception of Psyche, with the question besetting all visionaries: was his vision actual or an hallucination? Just as Psyche lived in

uncertainty about the husband she had loved but had not yet seen, so the poet is full of excited hope about the vision he has seen but has not yet accepted. And as Psyche was able to allay her anxiety by glimpsing and recognizing her husband's face, Keats can quiet his doubt by seeing the beautiful goddess, a second time, engaged in the rite of love and identifying her through this action.

To verify his experience he imaginatively relives it. Again he wanders idly in the forest, thoughtlessly unaware of the full meaning of the world as conveyed to him by his senses. As he awakes imaginatively to the beauty of the grass, trees, and flowers which hide Cupid and Psyche from profane, unbelieving eyes, he gradually penetrates to an unobstructed sight of the lovers. He first sees two unidentified "fair creatures / . . . In deepest grass, beneath the *whisp'ring* roof / Of leaves" (my italics). Not until his apprehension of the leafy world of the lovers becomes so intense that qualities of the sensible world such as sound cease to exist will he be able to see and recognize clearly that one of the fair creatures is Psyche. Trembling blossoms next meet the poet's eye. Whereas the leaves explicitly whispered earlier, the blossoms waving in the breeze now simply imply the possibility of sound. Finally he sees the creatures reclining "Mid *hush'd*, cool-rooted flowers" (my italics).

The poet has imaginatively re-entered Cupid and Psyche's leafy bower of bliss. "To his sight," as John Taylor asserts about Keats in the sonnet, *The Poet* ("At morn, at noon, at Eve, and Middle Night"),¹ "The husk of natural objects opens quite / To the core." Disclosed to him are "two fair creatures, couched side by side." The intensity of his vision of things of beauty permits him to look closely at the lovers. Veiled at first by "deepest grass," they lie at last in full view "on the *bedded* grass" (my italics), enjoying a perpetual consummation of love. Thus "Their lips touch'd not, but had not bade adieu." In this ever continuing act we have the first hint of the nature of the ideal concept which Psyche ultimately represents for Keats. Like the lovers on the frieze of the Grecian urn, whose "happy, happy love" is "For ever warm and still to be enjoyed, / For ever panting, and for ever young," Cupid and Psyche have neither just completed

¹ Mabel A. Steele, "The Authorship of 'The Poet' and Other Sonnets," *KSJ*, V (1956), 69-80, has established beyond reasonable doubt that the publisher Taylor wrote "The Poet," probably as a characterization of Keats; cf. E. L. Brooks, "'The Poet,' An Error in the Keats Canon?" *MLN*, LXVII (1952), 450-454.

loving nor only commenced; rather they are enjoying the act of love as a sensuous repetition without beginning or end. This eternally consummated passion is a concrete expression of the permanent implicit in the temporal, of the ideal love contained in the carnal, which Psyche symbolizes in the second and third sections of the poem.

But before such transcendent implications become apparent to Keats he must identify the lovers. Responding to the experience of their love making, he instantly recognizes Eros. "But who wast thou, O happy, happy dove?" he asks the other creature. For a moment more he hesitates, reluctant to accept the significance of the everyday world of appearances. One mortal had worshipped Cupid with passion sufficiently intense to win his love. Ecstatically Keats answers his own question. The beautiful girl repeatedly enacting her corporeal role of lover is Cupid's "Psyche true!"

3

The first movement of the poem has ended. With the personified Psyche identified and her physical passion for Cupid succinctly emphasized, Keats can now imaginatively comprehend the universal meaning of her earthly experience, by translating her sensuous beauty into its heavenly counterpart. Furthermore, through faith in his own speculative and poetic powers, he can help reinstate the significance of this apotheosis by adding it to his "modern" hierarchy of values and thus offset Psyche's bad luck in being born too late for the "antique vows" and the "fond believing lyre" accorded once to "Olympus' faded hierarchy." For as poet-priest he can recreate and immortalize Psyche, he can give poetic permanence to the divine soul of this lovely girl who had wandered so forlorn and lovesick about the earth, a victim of Venus's jealousy—an appropriate gesture for a poet who had noted in the 14 February-3 May 1819 letter to his brother, just before copying in a version of *Ode to Psyche*, that the pain and suffering of this world represent not a "vale of tears" but "The vale of Soul-making." The second section of the poem (lines 24-49) asserts a belief in the worship that was once due Psyche, with a rhapsodic, perhaps defiant, defense of the usefulness of poetic and mythologizing modes of thought.²

Keats indicates immediately the spiritual meaning Psyche has for him. He compares her favorably to Phoebe, apostrophized in *Endymion*

² Cf. Kenneth Allot, "Keats' 'Ode to Psyche,'" *Essays in Criticism*, VI (1956), 299-301.

(III, 74) as "utmost beauty," and to Venus, traditionally ascribed as the "amorous glow-worm of the sky" (my italics). The poetic function of these two comparisons is unmistakable. Keats is metamorphosing the fair beloved of Eros into a modern embodiment of beauty-sensuousness which replaces the legendary fairness of the moon goddess and the Olympian eroticism of the vesper goddess. His immortalizing of Psyche moves him to think of the form of worship due but never accorded to her divinity. Somewhat elegiacally at first, in muted tones,³ he muses on the ancient ritual. Invoking these sacramental duties gradually intensifies his cognizance and acceptance of the goddess. Fingering each bead, voicing each step of the sacrifice, the poet enters empathically into the service of Psyche. The meter recalls the unhurried regularity of a Gregorian chant. The many nasal sounds prolong the rise and fall of his voice. Individual identity is lost in the contemplation of the offices of worship. The poet becomes a priest of Psyche. Keats's imaginative recreation of a litany in adoration of the beautiful goddess—of the "virgin-choir" making "delicious moan," of the sound of the "lute" and the "pipe"—has transformed the outward appearance of Psyche into an inward spiritual significance. From realizing her as a fair creature coupled with Eros he has progressed to apprehending her as a divine goddess symbolizing earthly beauty-sensuousness. His vision of her "lucent fans, / Fluttering among the faint Olympians" elicits from him a plea that in his office as poet he might function as her choir, voice, lute, and oracle.

The poet's visionary ability to bridge the gap in time and belief separating ancient and modern days sufficiently to glimpse and worship Psyche as the ideal conception of actual beauty and love, which has just been traced through the poetic function of the language, can also be followed through the imagery. As Keats penetrates the world of the goddess, the poem moves from the transitory daylight hours of disbelief, when the poet wanders aimlessly about a forest, to "the midnight hours" of worship, when he enters heaven's dark mystery. For only "on the shores of darkness" is there light, Keats had written in 1818 in the sonnet *To Homer*, "a budding morrow in midnight." The poem also moves from a sense of coldness and transitory existence to one of warmth and continual life. Everything describing the poet's view of Psyche the mortal girl is associated with daylight and the dull coolness of dawn. The lovers lie in a shady forest bower alongside a

³Cf. E. C. Pettet, *On the Poetry of Keats* (Cambridge University Press, 1957), pp. 118-119.

cool brook. The "blue, silver-white" flowers are "cool-rooted." On the other hand, everything describing his vision of Psyche the immortal goddess is linked with night and the "sapphire-region'd" stars of Phoebe and Vesper, stars which Keats had invoked as "sapphire-warm" eleven months before in the sonnet, *On Visiting the Tomb of Burns*. Warm incense teems from a chain-swung censer. With heated vehemence ecstatic prophets sing the midnight litany of divine reverence offered up to the goddess.

The metrical structure also corroborates this intuition of a transcendent Psyche. The first four lines of the third stanza (lines 36-39) describe Psyche's neglect, fated by her being born when the high tide of ardor for the gods had subsided. The second quatrain (lines 40-43) asserts the poet's hard won faith in the fidelity of his imaginative vision of Psyche. They form an octave probing the problem of belief, modern skepticism "in these days so far retir'd / From happy pieties" contrasting with ancient faith "When holy were the haunted forest boughs." The thoughts, "too late for antique vows" and "Too, too late for the fond believing lyre," apply to Keats equally as well as to Psyche. As a modern mortal, he has been born too late to accept on faith alone. Only a concrete instance of sensuous beauty accompanied by a vision of its transcendent meaning will allay his doubts about the ultimate significance of beauty and love experienced in this life. But his incredulous senses distrust even his initial glimpse of truth. That is why he is retelling his experience. The poem, thus far, consists of Keats's effort to ascertain the reality of what his imagination has seen. It is his acquired faith in the fidelity of a repeated vision which makes it possible for him to exclaim, "I see, and sing, by my own eyes inspired." The two lines immediately following the octave express metrically as well as cognitively the poet's ecstatic perception of the unity of the material and immaterial worlds. He asks Psyche to enroll him among her priests and he will continue to sing of what he has poetically intuited. And the concluding quatrain reiterates enthusiastically the oracular forms his teeming, heated praise will take. The entire stanza is a Shakespearian sonnet, except that the usual concluding couplet appears in an unrhymed form after the octave. Hence, the ecstasy of the poet, bursting the inhibition of modern doubt, is faithfully reproduced by the unrhymed lawlessness of the misplaced couplet.

"Surely I dreamt to-day, or did I see / The winged Psyche with awaken'd eyes?" Keats asks at the outset. And the remainder of the poem is his answer. First, his skeptical eyes evoke the fair figure of a corporeal Psyche, thus acknowledging the content and form of the actual. Second, his rapt sight transforms the girl into a goddess, thus realizing the ideal world. Finally, doubt and rhapsody give way, in the third section (lines 50-67), to a poetic synthesis of the two perceptions, thus confirming the imaginative vision which both sees and creates.

Yes, I will be thy priest, and build a fane
In some untrodden region of my mind,
Where branched thoughts, new grown with pleasant pain,
Instead of pines shall murmur in the wind.

By his promising to dress a rosy sanctuary for Psyche "With the wreath'd trellis of a working brain" the poet effectively combines the earthly and the heavenly and insures himself a perpetual communion with both through the resultant poetry. Since a retelling of his encounter with Psyche has recreated for him the intensity of the original experience, he knows that a reduction of his imaginative experiences into "numbers" can preserve their initial viability. He will retain his identity—as we all must inevitably in this life. But as poet-priest he can function as a vehicle of the truth which he has experienced and thus retain a modicum of its self-destroying communion with beauty-sensuousness and its life-giving perception of the timeless order of things. Here, in the third section of the poem, are all the ingredients of the initial vision in a new, metamorphosed state. The "whisp'ring roof / Of leaves" beneath which the poet found Cupid and Psyche reappears as "branched thoughts" murmuring in the wind. The bower of "hush'd, cool-rooted flowers," among which the lovers nestled, is reborn in the poet's "working brain" as a sanctuary of "buds, and bells, and stars without a name," varieties which will never breed twice the same. Through the agency of "the gardener Fancy," here regarded as the voluntary poetic power, Keats is bringing the stilled physical world of nature, symbolized by the moss-lain dryads "lull'd to sleep," into meaningful unified equilibrium with the ideal world of the spirit.

Also, to insure Psyche's eternal union with Cupid the poet installs in his mind the symbolical "bright torch" of Hymen and a literal

"casement ope at night, / To let the warm Love in!"—a "casement" appropriately enough which also functions metaphorically as the senses through which Keats may renew his communion with beauty-sensuousness (Psyche), for it was through his senses that he had first apprehended the enchanting goddess. And if such impressions flourish only with "pleasant pain," it is because, as his experience with Psyche has illustrated, the joyous assurance of a correspondence between what he sees with his eyes and what he envisions with his mind grows out of painful doubt and wonder. Furthermore, as Keats and all of us realize sooner or later, the pleasures of growing usually involve some growing pains. And finally, there is a possibility that Keats is also saying that the aching heart comes, as in *Ode to a Nightingale*, from "being too happy in thine happiness," that the priest-poet worships beauty with such a high pitch of ecstasy that the unalloyed awareness of it is inevitably painful.*

Ode to Psyche in toto functions as a recurrent poetic distillation, an endlessly repeated hymnal celebrating the imaginative insight. Addressed to Psyche, the opening lines,

O Goddess! hear these tuneless numbers, wrung
By sweet enforcement and remembrance dear,

refer to what follows in the remainder of the poem. Although they are the first words spoken, they should appropriately be the last heard, for the poet is capable of speaking them only after he has verified their import by poetically reconstructing the event they celebrate. The numbers are tuneless because, like the melodies of the Grecian urn which "Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone," they play soundlessly in the poet's mind. There is also a suggestion of humility. The poet vis-à-vis his goddess feels the inadequacy of his song and the need to apologize for his crass celebration of her love for Cupid in rhymes scarcely commensurate with such inviolate truth. But most importantly, like the tuneless numbers of the Grecian urn enacting sensuously and eternally an artistic reconciliation of the mundane and spiritual worlds, the entire poem is a choir, a voice, a lute, a shrine, an oracle imaginatively and timelessly rendering the poet's belief in the experience of his senses and the truth which they convey of another world. Thus the poem comprises the oblations that the poet has promised to offer up to beauty and love. Like the Mass of the Latin Church which re-enacts the miracle of the last supper with each performance, *Ode to*

* Cf. H. W. Garrod, *Keats* (Oxford University Press, 1926), p. 102.

Psyche perpetually recreates Keats's vision anew. Like a Protestant sermon which penetrates the Christian mystery by retelling the story of Christ's life, the poem realizes the essential meaning of beauty-sensuousness by designing the tale of Psyche's love.

The poet sees the particulars of life in a new poetic focus. The critic sees the particulars of poetry in a new Gestalt convergence. Both act in conformity to a responsibility to understand. In *A Defense of Poetry* Shelley asserts that

A great poem is a fountain for ever overflowing with the waters of wisdom and delight; and after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine effluence which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and unconceived delight.

Certainly Keats's poems have endured such multiple readings. His contemporaries saw them as dabblings in the sensuous, the Pre-Raphaelites as accurate delineations of beautiful details, some in the twentieth century as neo-Platonic arguments for an ideal world, others as tributes to the immutable solace of art, and still others as autobiographical gleanings from a poetic diary. Clearly the urge to understand the poet-poem relationship and the desire to find a poem-audience relationship are fraught with the shoals of personal and historical blindness. At best we can hope that our critical soundings plumb the deep center of the poem while searching for a channel applicable to our time.

On the surface Keats appears concerned with imaging his dream of a Grecian world and mythology, with visualizing, spiritualizing, and worshiping Psyche—in short, recreating her—through the medium of his poem. *Ode to Psyche* is a confirmation of his belief that earthly beauty and love have an immutability which transcends their fleeting semblance. For him Psyche the girl, Psyche the goddess, and Psyche the ode are widening impressions of the same truth, all concentering in the stasis of the poem which stands as a timeless sign, an ikon, to the symbiotic imagination. Psyche (beauty-sensuousness) gives the poem universal meaning and through the poem acquires eternal continuity. As such, *Ode to Psyche* offers one more bit of evidence in support of those critics who believe that Keats's imagination seized on beauty and love as intuitive truths that life is more than the sensuous expression of any given moment.

If *Ode to Psyche* is aesthetically a completed gesture, it is also emblematically a continuing process. It eminently performs the poetic

task of projecting in parable the recurrent protean needs of successive generations, a function of myth eloquently described by I. A. Richards:

The saner and greater mythologies are not fancies; they are the utterance of the whole soul of man and, as such, inexhaustible to meditation. They are no amusement or diversion to be sought as a relaxation and an escape from the hard realities of life. They are these hard realities in projection, their symbolic recognition, coordination and acceptance. Through such mythologies our will is collected, our powers unified, our growth controlled. Through them the infinitely divergent strayings of our being are brought into "balance or reconciliation." The "opposite and discordant qualities" of things in them acquire a form; and such integrity as we possess as "civilized" men is our inheritance through them.⁵

I have described the progressive movements of *Ode to Psyche* at some length because clearly, in its poetic structuring of events, in the words again of Shelley's *Defense of Poetry*, is "unveil[ed] the permanent analogy of things." Its three-fold action contains for us a Gestalt apprehension of an ordered universe. Within such a frame it is of secondary importance that the warm Love entering at the open casement may refer explicitly to Fannie Brawne as Robert Gittings would have it⁶ or that the beauty celebrated in the Psyche devotions refers to poetic form as Kenneth Allott insists.⁷ It is the frame that counts. In the external design, the structural progression, of *Ode to Psyche* is a reminder that the mutable fact can be a means to the immutable essence, that life need not be willfully bifurcated but can be imaginatively unified.

⁵ Coleridge on Imagination (New York, 1950), pp. 171-172.

⁶ John Keats: *The Living Year* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954), p. 128.

⁷ Essays in Criticism, VI (1956), 298-301.

*"Pastors and Masters":
The Spoils of Genius*

Mr. Robert Liddell, in introducing his book *The Novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett* (London, 1955), comments: "In the case of the great writers of the past, we are anxious to learn what their contemporaries have said of them: surely it is right to save our literary generation from the discredit of not having issued one book about the novels of Ivy Compton-Burnett." Mr. Liddell has performed a valuable service, not only in issuing the only (still) book on its subject, but in correcting a number of erroneous impressions about Miss Compton-Burnett's novels and in outlining in summary form the various ingredients of those novels. But he has not, it seems to me, really convinced us of the artistry of any individual novel, and although he talks about Miss Compton-Burnett's development as a novelist, he has not noticeably traced that development. He has been more concerned to show the reality, or roots in reality of her characters and situations—so, for example, he discusses how horrible things *do* happen and how crimes *do* go unpunished—than to show the artistic life of the characters. As a prolegomenon to a fuller study, I should like to offer the following extended criticism of Miss Compton-Burnett's earliest novel (if we exclude *Dolores*), *Pastors and Masters*; for this novel, although a pale shadow of her succeeding novels, is nevertheless a mature work of art and affords a good insight into the world and art of its fleshier descendants.

The setting of this novel is not Miss Compton-Burnett's Victorian household but a boys' school; but there is here the genesis of interest in family relationships which is the core of the later novels. The school is owned and operated, after his fashion, by Nicholas Herrick, a seventy-year old literary critic, the first in the long succession of aged—but-youthful egotists and tyrants who people Miss Compton-Burnett's literary world. The story of the book, as distinct from the plot,

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revolves around the daily, rather sordid struggle for existence in the school environment: the novel opens with a Dickensian glimpse into the operation of the school from breakfast through tea-time, and ends with a dinner on a later occasion given to propitiate one of the parents whose money helps eke out the school's existence. The school's chief distinction probably lies in the relationship and functions of its chief, Herrick, and its schoolmaster, Mr. Merry. For Herrick's main contribution to his establishment's welfare, apart from his having situated it in his old university town and lent it his good name, is the reading of prayers ten minutes a day; while Mr. Merry is uneducated and earns his bread by persuading parents that their children will be in good hands at Herrick's. The symbiotic relationship between chief and schoolmaster is typical of the human relationships in the novel and illustrates one of the author's dominant themes.

The plot of this novel, less melodramatic than those of most of Miss Compton-Burnett's later works, is a little gem which beautifully fulfills the function of plot as conceived by the author in a conversation with M. Jourdain in *Orion: A Miscellany*, 1945: to give all events significance; to give rise to secondary scenes that bring out personality and give scope for character revelation. The occasion of the plot is the morning after Herrick and his friends Masson and Bumpus have watched alternately at the deathbed of an eighty-nine year old colleague, Crabbe. The setting is Herrick's office and domicile, which he shares with his half-sister Emily, aged fifty, the protagonist of the novel. Bumpus and Masson come for a visit, and the conversation turns to Crabbe and his failure to write a line of something creative. Bumpus is impelled to boast that *he* has written something; in fact, as his friends know, he had written a book twenty-five years ago but had romantically buried the manuscript with a friend who had died. Now, he has written again and will be finished shortly. Upon hearing this, Herrick announces that he, too, after seventy years of non-creativity, is writing a little book (both his and Bumpus' are "little" and "novels"). Herrick has been inspired, he says, by sitting up and watching at Crabbe's deathbed. The friends agree to a reading of their novels at some future date. The denouement is wonderfully achieved. The reading takes place at the home of the Rev. Peter Fletcher, whose family fulfills the "pastor" half of the book's title. Herrick, about to begin reading his masterpiece, notices on looking over Bumpus' shoulder that his and his friend's first sentences are the same. For the moment, though, the import of this escapes him. He is about to begin

again when Bumpus is impelled to tell how he had lost the original *typescript* of his book: he had lent it to Crabbe and it had been destroyed, he supposed, along with Crabbe's other papers. At this, Herrick declines to read his novel, but Bumpus is persuaded to read his. Masson, however, suddenly tells his friend that he had kept and read a copy of the manuscript of Bumpus' earlier novel, the one Bumpus had buried so romantically, despite the fact that he was supposed to have destroyed it without reading it. Thereupon Bumpus begs off reading, and it remains for Emily to put the facts together and explain to her friend and confidante, Theresa, Peter's wife, after the men have departed, what none of them perceived in its entirety but only as it related to his own criminality: that her brother had found Bumpus' *typescript* among Crabbe's papers that night (the origin of his bedside "inspiration"), thought it to be Crabbe's, and was going to pass it off as his own; furthermore, that the *typescript* was really a recollection by Bumpus of his earlier novel which, after Herrick's purloining, he had had to recollect still another time for the novel he had meant to present that day. And the friends had been saved from exposing their frauds to each other by the inadvertent admissions as the readings were about to begin. That Herrick later tells Emily that Bumpus, en route home, confessed his duplicity (or triplicity); that he shakes his head and feels tolerant of the weakness of his "gifted, erring friend" but never acknowledges his own criminal action even to Emily—all this is part of the final and delightful revelation of character that the plot has been designed to accomplish. It is a part, also, of Miss Compton-Burnett's pervasive commentary on human nature, its motivations and its values.

The view of life Miss Compton Burnett propounds in *Pastors and Masters* is in all her novels—a view eminently fitted to the late Victorian scene of those novels. (*Pastors and Masters* seems to take place a little later in time, as it refers to female suffrage; but the atmosphere is the same.) Here, in a studied pattern, she presents social life as a struggle for existence in which the fittest survive, where codes of morality have nothing to do with success. The purely physical struggle is secondary, though it is there in the school and its significance, and in the circle of the Fletcher family. But primarily the need to dominate and triumph emotionally motivates Miss Compton-Burnett's tyrants and exploiters, and is the main-spring of the action of her novels.

Pastors and Masters is a study in various kinds and varying degrees of parasitism, with people living off other people; it is a study of

exploiters and exploited, of tyrants and victims, in many guises. Yet there is a *necessity* (the word is the author's) in all this; the exploited need their exploiters and are bound to them in many ways. One is reminded of the *Origin of Species* and the chain of interdependence of species upon species for survival. In fact, one of the principal movements or patterns in Miss Compton-Burnett's novels involves a symbiotic relationship in spite of the victim's efforts to escape the emotional overlordship imposed upon him into an emotional fulfillment of his own. We can see such a pattern very clearly in this early novel. The most important relationship is between Herrick and his half-sister Emily. Emily recognizes that her brother lives off her emotionally as he lives off Mr. Merry economically. He even has his deathbed scene all nicely arranged, he tells Emily, with Emily watching over it, to which his sister responds somewhat bitterly: "But perhaps you have left my deathbed to Mr. Merry. There is no reason why he shouldn't take all your responsibilities." She nevertheless lives her life for Nicholas. She tells Theresa, "You know how I feel to him as well as I do myself. How utterly I see through him, and yet how necessary he is to me. And how pathetic. It will break my heart if this wretched book goes wrong." Emily sees in the novel her brother is writing a chance for some independence for herself; perhaps she may even marry Masson. Her admiration for Nicholas increases as the fatal day of the reading approaches; his creativeness as well as his egotism impresses her more and more that he is a genius. Then comes the exposé. The sympathetic reader feels that the revelation of Nicholas' fraud should jolt Emily into asserting her freedom. But aptly enough, both psychologically and aesthetically, this new knowledge about her brother's capacity for deceit only binds Emily more tightly to him; and it is with genuine admiration that she replies to his ultimate duplicity in feeling sorry for Bumpus' "erring" without admitting his own: "Nicholas, you really are a genius." The bird has become more closely enmeshed in the net. Consciously or unconsciously, the exploiter has adapted himself to environmental change to preserve his emotional domination. (The later novels produce some striking variations on the way in which the tyrants manage to maintain their hold on their victims, like Horace, in *Manservant and Maidservant*, deliberately becoming lovable when he learns of Charlotte's and Mortimer's plan to leave him.)

There is, then, a circular movement in the relationship between Emily and her brother, a circular movement common to Miss Compton-Burnett's novels. (It might be noted that in *Manservant and Maid-*

servant even the last scene itself repeats the opening one, with Horace complaining to Bullivant about the fire's smoking.) But there is at the same time a difference in the final relationship, the result of new knowledge on the part of Emily. Mr. Angus Wilson, in the *London Magazine* of July, 1955, comments on this aspect of Miss Compton-Burnett's literary world in connection with the later novels:

The revelation of incest and of illegitimacy must mean the members of a family have to see themselves anew as different people in exactly the most important sense that exists in the family unit—they are no longer sons and daughters, or they are not only sons and daughters of their parents but brothers and sisters as well. And if, as so often happens, they later find that the revelation was untrue, they must once again revert to their former view of their personalities, but the former view can never be what it was before because they have learned in between to see the whole of their world from a different angle. . . .

In *Pastors and Masters* the revelation of the depths of exploitation to which Nicholas will sink in order to satisfy his emotional needs makes Emily go back to her original view of her brother and her original relationship with him—but with a difference. And that difference underscores the final evaluation of character that is Miss Compton-Burnett's commentary on life.

This final evaluation is part of the complexity of the novel. For this amoral, predatory world is not presented objectively, despite the fact that the predators get away with their crimes (most notably, of course, Anna Donne in *Elders and Bettters*). It is complicated by the point of view of the victims, with whom the author's and the reader's sympathies lie. The amorality is seen through their eyes, with their various senses of right and wrong, of good and evil, of selfishness and selflessness. So that when Emily immolates herself to her brother's egotism, genuinely feeling that he is a genius, we perceive we have been privileged to see into a world as sensitive and complex, morally and intellectually, as Henry James's.

Miss Compton-Burnett has set before us a world which we cannot take lightly or simply. We are shocked by the fact that even so petty a crime as plagiarism escapes without the conventional poetic retribution, and outraged by the indestructible hold the exploiters have on their victims. At the same time we are made to view the criminality and the exploitation with a sense of admiration: our normal sense of

values seems to be suspended. In this novel the suspension is embodied in the idea of the genius vs. the ordinary person. The ordinary people, in the long view of the book, are the good people, those who do things for themselves, even those who are creative. The genius is the man like Nicholas, who has the gift of getting the best out of others, as Emily herself suggests at the time the plot is getting under way, in reference to Nicholas' use of Mr. Merry as schoolmaster (she is ignorant at this point of how much Herrick hopes to get out of someone else's writing!). The genius is capable of sustaining deception when he practices it, in the face of reason and goodness. The contest between Nicholas and Bumpus, which begins as one of creativeness, ends as one of fraudulence. The man who has *some* creativeness in him—Bumpus at least had written one novel—and some decency by conventional moral standards to confess his temptation, comes off second best. The reader's sympathies, controlled finally by Emily's reaction to the ultimate revelation, or concealment, remain finely poised between horror and admiration, between a sense of outrage and a sense of the ridiculous.

Having throughout the novel hoped and waited for Emily's declaration of independence, the reader ultimately realizes the more valid aesthetic satisfaction of having seen the frightening strength of moral weakness, the unshakable power against which understanding is the only defense available to the morally strong. Our reaction to Miss Compton-Burnett's picture of the fixed necessities governing human relationships reminds us, in a way, of our response to the inevitability of tragedy. The writer's artistic integrity enhances our appreciation of sanity and moral strength even in showing that it is the morally weak who inherit the earth. For Emily's insight and moral integrity are still preferable to Herrick's kind of genius (as well as to conventional Christian do-gooding, as we shall see later). Her triumph in maintaining dignity while protecting her brother in his weakness renders Herrick's genius somewhat foolish and pathetic.

The central theme of exploitation-symbiosis is studied in other contexts than the Emily-Nicholas relationship in the course of the novel; and with it, in its distention on the loom, are interwoven many subsidiary themes, which reappear in the later novels. Both the distention and the interweaving can best be observed in terms of the other characters of *Pastors and Masters*.

There is a rather rigorous division of the characters into groups of four: 1) Emily, Nicholas, Bumpus and Masson; 2) the schoolmasters: Mr. Merry, Mrs. Merry, Mr. Burgess and Miss Basden; 3) the pastors: the Reverend Peter Fletcher, his wife Theresa, his sister Lydia and his

nephew the Reverend Francis Fletcher; 4) parent and children: Mr. Bentley, his daughter Delia by a first marriage, and his sons Harry and John by a second.

Bumpus and Masson complete the principal "quadrivirate"; their roles in the plot have already been touched upon. Their relationship to each other and to Emily and Nicholas is a more important part of the design of the novel. Bumpus, I have suggested, is a character foil to Herrick. Unlike Herrick, and more like his sister, Bumpus is witty and cynical—a sign, in the Compton-Burnett cosmos, that he is doomed to languish among the ordinary people, among the exploited or victims of the world. (Miss Compton-Burnett's tyrants are too egotistical and too lacking in insight to have a genuine sense of humor; they are capable only of the limited resourcefulness necessary to maintain their emotional hold over their victims.) Bumpus is a vital person who likes God "not childless, and grasping and fond of praise," who likes "the human and family interest," who wants the "whole of experience." He genuinely wishes to be creative, jealously so, and admits to Masson that he will go to almost any lengths to be successful short of stealing other people's material. Unlike, of course, Herrick, who will stop short of nothing to be *known* as creative.

The reader is prepared from the beginning to accept Bumpus' final offstage confession of duplicity: he is too sensitive an individual, and he has some moral standards. The Herricks of this world gobble up the prizes, if there are prizes to be won.

And what of William Masson? Interestingly enough, he is a scientist. It is one of Miss Compton-Burnett's weaknesses as a novelist that the professions of her characters, when they have any professions, are never credible. Masson's role as a science don is a good illustration of this deficiency. More pointedly, Masson is a foil to Emily and, in his relations with Bumpus, a further study in necessary exploitation. Emily and Theresa discuss the possibility of William's marrying Emily, and Bumpus and Masson discuss the same possibility; but both parties know—after all, they *are* fifty and sixty years of age—that it is not in the cards. Here one of those taboo subjects intrudes itself upon the world of the novel. When Bumpus and Masson first appear, the author comments very casually, "The two were Fellows and dons at Herrick's college, and had meant romance for each other in youth." By itself, this statement might seem to have no sinister implications, but taken in conjunction with a few other judiciously placed details (the usual method of character revelation in the author's novels) it suggests a homosexual relationship between the two friends. For

Masson is further described as having a "high, stammering voice," and in a conversation about the nature of God, Masson remarks, "Yes, he tends to be neutral nowadays. . . . Perhaps I do resemble him in that"—an allusion to his role both as scientist and bisexual being. And Masson provides an artistic balance in sexuality to the man-woman Emily (Bumpus calls attention to Emily's masculine attributes). This balance is made more explicit when, in a conversation with Theresa, Emily replies to her friend's question as to whether William wants to marry her (Emily), "As much as he can want to marry anyone. Anyone who is a woman. And that is not very much." To which Theresa replies, "Oh dear! These dons and people!" And Emily, "Yes, it is something of that way. I knew you knew all the time. I might tell you it is that way with me too." Masson finally clarifies the symbiotic relationship in his quadrivirate in response to Bumpus' offer to intercede for him with Emily. First, he says, he would do the proposing himself, like an ordinary man, if he really wanted to marry Emily. Then: "I would take anything from you. . . . But I would have you understand my feeling for Emily. I have all you supposed I might have for her. And I hope she has something for me. But you are the more necessary to me, as her brother is to her. That is not to say that you and he are exactly first to either of us. Do you see?" To which his friend replies, "Yes, I think I have always seen."

The story or plot connection between the main foursome and the other foursomes of *Pastors and Masters* is tenuous at best; in later novels, Miss Compton-Burnett learns to tighten her structure. It is the theme which fascinates her in this novel, and the interplay of ideas. Thus, the tie between the schoolmaster and the Herricks and their friends is the rather nebulous functioning of Herrick as prayer-reader and "host" at special occasions, such as a prize-giving ceremony or a propitiatory dinner. Emily, on occasion, lends herself to door-tending. But the Merrys and Mr. Burgess and Miss Basden occupy their own tight little world within the school. Their relations with one another, however, furnish a further study in exploitation.

The schoolmasters are a strange group. Merry, of course, is being exploited by Herrick for his talent with parents; but Merry, being uneducated, must lean on the members of his cast for the accomplishment of any actual teaching. His wife teaches the Scripture class, but from the glimpse we are given into that (she reads the explication of the text her book furnishes, and if a student asks something not found therein, she simply says that the book says nothing on the subject, period), very little knowledge is being engendered here. Mrs. Merry

(rather, "Mother," as her husband calls her throughout the book; and a pathetic case she is), is always on the verge of collapse. Her principal function seems to be to preside over tea and coffee cups. Miss Compton-Burnett remarks on the "consistency of fate" which always places her in front of an urn and cups—we have here, perhaps, one of the few symbols in the novel, the feeding of others which the victim always provides.

Mr. Burgess, the young master who teaches older boys, is as egocentric in his way as Herrick is in his. He is never on time, and much prefers reading his *Times* to doing his duty. Miss Basden remains in the background for most of the novel. We gather, however, that the real functioning of the school falls upon her shoulders. She is really the exploited. There is an amusing scene at the prize-giving ceremony which fixes Miss Basden's position very neatly, and reveals, incidentally, Miss Compton-Burnett's technique in interweaving ideas:

(Mr. Merry): "You know Miss Basden, do you not, Mr. Bentley?"

"No, I think not," said Mr. Bentley, simply.

"Why, she is always here, Father. Every year," said the daughter. "How are you, Miss Basden?"

"She is always here. Every year here with us," said Mr. Merry, lifting his hands on and off Miss Basden's shoulders. "Always here, so that people don't notice her any more than they do one of ourselves. Because she is one of ourselves, if she will be, aren't you, Miss Basden?"

"You see the difference between ordinary people and Mr. Merry," said Emily to Bumpus. "And you said you did not know Miss Basden. You rank with the ordinary people."

"I always suspected it," said Bumpus.

In the final chapter Miss Basden emerges as a suffragette, and she is linked with Mrs. Merry and Emily in the revelation that her third name and Mrs. Merry's Christian name are also "Emily." The main theme, through Miss Basden, thus emerges in a new key, as the exploitation of women as a group, high-lighted by the spirited discussion between Francis Fletcher and Miss Basden, in which the latter crystallizes the Victorian "sentimental exaltation of women" as the worst form of their exploitation.

Mr. Merry deserves special consideration. He may be one of Miss Compton-Burnett's archetypes, the Psychopathic Nagger, as Pamela Hansford-Johnson calls him, but he is more than that. He is a good

example of Miss Compton-Burnett's ability to give the illusion of depth and complexity to even the most caricatured of her characters. In contrast to Emily, who though exploited always maintains her dignity and individuality, Mr. Merry is soulless, a rather ill-made harp for any wind to play upon. He *can* charm parents, but his attempts to impress himself upon his students through his nagging and complaining are ludicrous and painful. His over-solicitude for "Mother" is grotesquely comic; his attempts to handle Burgess are amusing.

The theme of necessity finds its first expression in the opening chapter of *Pastors and Masters* in relation to Mr. Merry and the boys under his jurisdiction. Mr. Merry, called from his tea by Herrick to interview a parent of a prospective student, complains as usual about lack of consideration, but, at the top of the stairs, causes "his face to undergo a change, preparatory to whatever final one might be expedient." Back in the schoolroom once again, he, Mrs. Merry and the others discuss the possible addition of a new boy, the hardships it will impose and the little money it will really bring in. "I could always do with what had to be done with," Miss Basden says. "But," she continues, "the boys are quite mistaken, if they think that is any indication that they are needed by anyone. It is they who do the needing, I think." Mr. Merry concurs: "It is indeed. They who do the needing! I should think so. I should be glad to be told of something they don't need. Because I don't know of anything, and that is the truth. I have just been hearing what is good enough for them. And I don't see anything about them that seems to call for it. I don't indeed." It is on this ambiguous note about who needs whom that the first chapter ends, a fitting conclusion to the prologue of this study in exploitation-symbiosis.

It is in the third chapter of the novel that the Fletcher family makes its appearance to give us another view of human relationships. The Rev. Peter and his wife Theresa are the first of those Compton-Burnett couples who live in the background of the novels, isolated, who serve as commentators or observers of the social scene and can maintain some degree of integrity and sincerity, neither exploiting nor being exploited. These people are usually on the fringe of poverty, but stoically resigned to their lot. True, Peter and Theresa have been exploited by people and fate in the past: first, they had lost Peter's inheritance through lending it to a man who defaulted; then, Peter's congregation had gradually defected; finally, as we learn only toward the end of the book, their two sons had been killed. But they have learned to live with equanimity, setting off each other in their char-

acters, Peter being kindly humorous and Theresa fierce but understanding. Theresa's role in the novel is that of the Jamesian confidante. She is the one to whom Emily can talk freely and finally explain the circumstances of the plot (and thus explain them to the reader). She is also the embittered and cynical observer of the scene. Peter's function is not so clear. He is about to retire at sixty-nine though he hasn't a gray hair on his head. He has lost his control of things, however, as his congregation seems to prefer the "ritualists" to the simple service he gives. The contrast with Herrick suggests itself. Herrick is "a short, impressive old man with a solid neck and head, heavy gray hair, and features with a touch of the Jew." Despite his seventy years, he is hale and hearty and not in the least perturbed by the thought of death. Peter has always given of himself and at sixty-nine is played out; Herrick, the splendid egotist, is still youthful at seventy.

Age is always an explicit factor in an Ivy Compton-Burnett novel. The main characters, the tyrants and exploiters, are invariably old, though they dominate the scene. This first novel explains, I think, the nature of the emphasis on age in the novels. For here age becomes part of the subject of conversation. Herrick laments, for example, that his age and Bumpus' do not coincide. The key speech is, however, Emily's. She is answering Theresa's comment that she, Emily, should point out to her brother how outsiders might view the "ten minutes" of his time he gives to the school: "You know that would not make him see it. Apart from the way he already sees it. And I believe it is good for him to feel himself a kind of hero. It holds him up from going down into old age." That is, as long as one does not see himself whole, as long as one retains an heroic image of oneself inviolate, as egotists do, one retains youth and the ability to survive and dominate in this Darwinian-shaped world. Bumpus, in contrast to Herrick, has moved into the downward path of old age, despite his comparative youth, since he has lived through and acknowledged his criminal experience; Herrick has been able to shake the experience from him without really having lived it. Peter is old despite his youthful appearance because he has had the whole of experience. And Emily in the course of the novel changes from agelessness in her fiftieth year (so the three friends discuss her appearance and nature at the beginning of the novel) to aging on her fifty-first birthday, when she lives through as much as she can bear in the near-exposure of her brother's and Bumpus' duplicity.

Miss Lydia Fletcher provides another balance in the novel and, in her way, combines a further development of the symbiosis theme with

the subsidiary theme concerning the real nature of goodness. For Lydia is a "do-gooder" in the conventional pattern of Christian charity. Women don't take to her, she says, but her "men-things" adore her for her good deeds. She wrestles earnestly with the problem of poverty:

"The man has struggled to get work [she says of one of her cases] until he is hopeless, just to get work, just that, poor soul. Hopeless and distrustful of everything. He hardly trusted me at first. But he does now, dear fellow. Dear fellow, how he does!" Lydia went to her desk, and stood with her knuckles on it, her eyes looking into space. The matter seemed not long without light for her; for she hastened towards the door.

Her goodness impresses her brother, but Theresa has her own point of view about Lydia's goodness: "A soul who ought to be good. No family, and an income of her own! She could not spend every penny she has on herself." She comments further: "Of course, Lydia flirts with her men. She may not know it, but she does." The reader is inclined to side with Theresa's estimate; Lydia's symbiotic relationship with her "men-things" is all too clear and, as her own speech and actions reveal, she is a very silly person. (She is, in fact, a forerunner of that much greater comic in *A House and its Head*, Dulcia.) Miss Compton-Burnett's final evaluation of Miss Lydia resides in the contrast she establishes with Emily, and the evaluation, appropriately enough, comes through Theresa, after the revelation of Herrick's duplicity. Emily's parting speech to Theresa after she has explained the complicated goings-on, is as follows:

"There are Lydia and Peter coming up the road. It is nice to see Peter in innocent company again. [Peter had accompanied Herrick and Bumpus and Masson after the fiasco of the reading.] I can't meet them, Theresa. I am going home to write it all in my diary. I keep a diary, because I think I have that kind of personality. I must put in my will that it is to be destroyed at my death. For fear somebody should read it, and publish it, and pretend they had written it. Unless I leave it to Nicholas, so that he can have written a book after all. I hope he will outlive me. I would commit suicide, except that now I believe in religion, and religion does not allow that. And I am not single for the sake of Nicholas. I read in a book that no woman could love a man she did not make sacrifices for. But there is so much falseness about books. Too much, I think."

Theresa sums up the contrast between Lydia's kind of goodness and Emily's in a remark to Peter as he comes in alone, a remark which balances his earlier remark about Lydia: "Emily is worth a thousand Lydias."

The fourth member of the Fletcher family, Francis, is another of the egotists of the novel. He is smug and self-satisfied, prim and ultra-Victorian. He and Miss Basden, as I have mentioned, come to verbal blows in the final chapter over the place of women in society. It is Theresa again who furnishes the final evaluation of her kinsman when Emily considers the possibility of Francis' marrying Miss Basden:

"If Francis should marry Miss Basden," said Emily to Theresa, "the school would go down just as Nicholas begins to need the comforts of old age. Unless he would live here with her."

"He is good at living in other people's houses," said Theresa.

A final word about the pastors: the family relationships they exhibit are but touched on in this novel. "'What a lovely family group,' said Emily, as the Fletchers came in [to the dinner party in the last chapter]. 'An uncle and a nephew, and a brother and a sister and an aunt, and a husband and a wife, and I think some more, all in four people!'" Here, perhaps, is the seed of Miss Compton-Burnett's interest in the involved relationships between members of a family that predominates in her later novels; that, indeed, was to blossom in her next novel into the complex incestuous relationships between brothers and sisters who are not only brothers and sisters, but other things to each other as well.

The Bentley menage furnishes the last study in exploitation, here in the relationships between father and children. Although this group of characters is the least integrated into the structure of the novel, it is the predecessor of the many tyrannical household situations in Miss Compton-Burnett's literary world. The Bentleys' excuse for being in the story lies in the fact that Harry and John, Mr. Bentley's two sons by his second marriage, are students in Herrick's school; and at the prize-giving ceremony Mr. Bentley sees through Mr. Merry, necessitating a dinner, so Emily feels, to propitiate him so that he will keep his boys in school. The chief interest of this foursome, which includes Mr. Bentley's daughter Delia, aged thirty, by a first marriage, lies in the relationships within the group.

Parent(s) and children—that is the title of one of the author's later novels. The parent in this case, like Mr. Merry something of a psycho-

pathic nagger, monologues his children about all he does for them and their lack of respect for him. His bullying complaints to and about his boys are symptomatic of his emotional exploitation of his family. His obtuseness and lack of insight are typical of the tyrant. The conclusion of Chapter V, the chapter in which we are given the glimpse into the Bentley household, is a nice coda to this movement of the novel. Mr. Bentley is haranguing his boys about their never bringing friends home; they seem to have plenty at school:

"Anyone would think you would be proud to let them see your father and your sister and your surroundings. I can't think what makes you so affected and self-conscious about it. Now once for all, what is it?

"Well, do not speak then, do not speak. Go off to your own employment, and settle down by yourselves; and do not say a word to your father who makes sacrifices all day, that you might have further pleasure. Go away then, and do not speak. Behave as my children always do. 'Go away, without a word, to your own concerns.'

The sacrifices of which Bentley speaks have amply been shown to be non-existent. The children, it will be noted, fail to speak; and this is typical of the children in this novel. In the schoolroom scenes we never hear them open their mouths. We see them only through Mr. Merry's or the author's eyes. In Chapter V, the younger son, John, makes only a few one- or two-word replies to queries by his father; Harry, the elder, doesn't say much more. In her later novels, the author furnishes her exploited children with tongues which explode the hypocrisy of the adults who feed on them emotionally; their insights into the sacrificial-tyranny of their parents or other older relations and their quick-witted puncturing of their relatives' pretenses become their defense, their only defense, against their exploitation. In *Pastors and Masters*, however, their only defense is silence, and though this may be adequate in its way, it is less aesthetically satisfying to the reader. Only at one point is there a hint of the later technique. Mr. Bentley is upbraiding his children for their lack of consideration as usual, the occasion being his annoyance at Harry for the boy's swinging his foot, when Harry says,

"Is it I who have brought this on everyone, Father?"

"Is it you? Oh, yes, you are sure to be the prominent figure in your own view of anything."

"I cannot alter my nature," muttered the boy.

The suggestion of the unalterableness of human nature may be noted. It, too, is a principal tenet of the Compton-Burnett cosmos.

The four movements of the novel ultimately coalesce in the final chapter in the dinner at the school. Not only are all the figures from the four foursomes present (except for Bentley's two boys), but the various subthemes as well as the principal theme receive here their final resolution. The natures of the characters have not changed, but we are allowed to see them in a final perspective that gives us full understanding of them and their relationships to others. This emergence of character into its full light, its ambiguities clarified by context, is part of Miss Compton-Burnett's metaphysical system as well as of her technique.

The tyrants, each in his own way, will continue to enjoy their emotional spoils. Herrick has his Emily more closely attached to him than before, despite her knowledge (or because of it) about his lack of morality. Merry still will nag his students and complain, and live off the teachings of his educated betters. Bentley will continue to berate his children and hold them in emotional subjugation. And Francis will always be smug, prim, old-fashioned, parasitic. But we also see the exploiters deflated. Francis is given his come-uppance by Miss Basden over the subject of woman's place in society; and his silliness, like that of his Aunt Lydia, is fully revealed. Merry is shown in his social behavior before, during, and after dinner to be even more of a hypocrite and fool than we knew. Bentley, for all his hogging of the scene in Chapter V, opens his mouth only twice at the dinner, the second time being at his departure, when the author wryly comments on "his voice falling with an unfamiliar sound." And Herrick is at last deftly, if lovingly, laid out and pinned in place by Emily's reply to his last speech:

"Yes, yes, Emily. I dare say I shall have time yet. Time to do something in. It sometimes happens that the end of a man's life sums him up. There is no great wrong about being an exception. Exceptions are more worthy of interest in a way. I don't think I have ever been quite on the ordinary line."

"No, I am sure you have not. It would have been dreadful of you."

Verbal Pattern in "Burnt Norton I"

A close textual analysis of the beginning of T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*¹ is at once rewarded by the emergence of significant pattern that brings the humblest of the poem's structural elements into vital rather than mechanical relation with the import of the whole, and affords new insight into the meaning.

The opening lines of the first section of *Burnt Norton*:

- 1 Time present and time past
- 2 Are both perhaps present in time future
- 3 And time future contained in time past

appropriately constitute a thematic statement (in the musical sense) of the interrelations of time past, present and future which are to recur as motifs throughout the *Quartets*. Both the thought pattern and the rhetorical pattern with their reiterated "time" in stressed positions impart a gnomic quality which colors the immediately succeeding pair of "plain" sentences:

- 4 If all time is eternally present
- 5 All time is unredeemable.
- 6 What might have been is an abstraction
- 7 Remaining a perpetual possibility
- 8 Only in a world of speculation.

After this the dissolving spell is caught up again in

- 9 What might have been and what has been
- 10 Point to one end, which is always present

before its concretization in the garden imagery which follows.

The effect of 1-3 resides partly in the position of the adjectives as

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¹ The edition quoted throughout is that of T. S. Eliot, *Complete Poems and Plays* (New York, 1952), henceforth referred to as CPP.

well as in their interplay. The departure from normal word order in each of the five occurrences of the attributives with the chime-like identical noun sets the passage apart from ordinary discourse. Unique and unitary, it has a strong line-to-line linkage that becomes characteristic of verse series similar in tone.² The predicate "present" in line 2 binds while it varies, and the juxtaposed "in time future, / And time future" creates an impression of the incremental repetition of folk charm or nursery tale. The simplicity and assurance proper to these are vitiated however by the rather central "perhaps" which communicates an air of tentativeness extended even to the participle "contained" which it may be considered as also modifying. The absence of a finite verb in line 3 increases its dependence on the foregoing, and the concluding "in time past" completes the internal reference and closes the unit with double decisiveness, by the finality of the word "past" as contrasted with an uncircumscribed "future," and by the simultaneously chiastic and parallel figure it fills out:

| | |
|------------------|-----------------|
| and . . . past | in . . . future |
| and . . . future | in . . . past |

The verbal tension is further heightened by exhausting the (mathematical) combinations of the three words, "present," "past," and "future":

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| 1 | present . . . past |
| 2 | present . . . future |
| 3 | future . . . past |

Seen thus in isolation the words tend to assume the trappings of a syllogism, or at least to imply that "things equal to the same thing are equal to each other." (And line 4 makes this explicit.)

Another quasi-mathematical relationship is suggested by the medial and initial "and's" in lines 1 and 3 respectively:

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| 1 | present <i>and</i> past |
| 2 | present-future |
| 3 | And future-past |

It is as though a proportion were being set up between the halves of line 1 and the 2nd and 3rd lines:

present : past :: present-future : future-past

Similarly, the term "future" appears to be the mean proportional

² *East Coker*, lines 37-47, 85-87.

between "present" and "past." This last is an arresting consideration as indicating the transcendence of logic and chronology which would read "present" as the middle term between "past" and "future." Syntactically there is no such violation; the sense might be reasonably reduced to "Past and present determine future," which would indeed be "unredeemable" in terms of the deterministic view from which the implied "Redeem the time" preserves us. The spatial configuration of the words can be seen therefore as counterpointing the grammatical and adding to the complexity of the latter a (wholesomely) disturbing element of the non-discursive.

The solemnity of the utterance is enhanced by the relatively unslurable labials and dentals which dominate the consonant composition of the three lines, where no liquid but the almost entirely inconspicuous "r" eases transitions. The vowels are well hemmed in—the only open syllable is the first in "future." The wide vowel range of the second line emphasizes by contrast the restricted scope of the lines preceding and following.

The terse statement of lines 4 and 5,

If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable,

neat clause per neat line, relieves its monosyllables in the contrasting second half-lines which complete the matching firsts. The hint of question-and-answer in condition and apodosis is strengthened by repeating, catechism-wise, "All time is" a trifle more slowly than on its appearance a moment ago with the introductory "If." We are inclined to give the same temporal value to both lines, retarding the second ever so slightly (or lengthening "All" and "un-") to compensate for the syllable missing at either end (as compared with the count above). The hemistichal four-stress character of these lines confirms the beat felt in "Time present and time past" (line 1) but weakened in the interim lines. This rhythmic matrix is perceived with varying intensity throughout the sections to which it is basic much as the heartbeat fades and loudens under shifting stress. Its underlying presence gives cohesiveness and imposes a certain restraint within which ingenuity is exercised to secure the differentiated tonal effects; these are realized in terms of line length and weight, position and number of unstressed elements, the placing or neglecting of the caesura, and other factors which depend on the sounds of the component words as these are conditioned by the sense and connotation.

Thus the end-stopped quality of lines 1-5 is altered in the next group of three lines which but for the typography would be read in one breath:

- 6 What might have been is an abstraction
- 7 Remaining a perpetual possibility
- 8 Only in a world of speculation.

The main stresses are accordingly muted and internal pauses unapparent. These become deliberate again only as we approach the remembered garden with its echoing footfalls.

Yet in each of these lines as in those preceding the last word assumes a dominance and key-relation to what goes before:

past—future—past—present
unredeemable—abstraction—possibility—speculation

Viewed from this position a new four-four alignment asserts itself beneath the three-two-three syntactical pattern as a second instance of the species of counterpoint noted above.

The crisp precision of 6-8 arises chiefly from the diction. Although line 6 shows the monosyllabic first half plus copula plus polysyllabic pattern of lines 4 and 5, there is a difference in rhythm, a lightening brought about by the quickly spoken "What might have been" with its single strong stress balancing "is an abstraction." Economy of phrase replaces phrasal echo in the pregnant sentence which, admitting the real limitations of "a world of speculation," recognizes also its imaginative force as a modified of experience. The alliterated "perpetual possibility," with the participle binding it more intimately than would a clause to the "abstraction" which has been equated with "what might have been," keeps up the rhythmic impression of a rapidly turning wheel which is continued in the next line and which in both depends on the suppression of one of the four beats and the even disposition of the three remaining. "Only" gains emphasis by recalling the accent to the first syllable of the line as in 1 and 5 and by its apt situation in the sentence.

Lines 9 and 10,

What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present,

tie up by repetition ("What might have been") and by paraphrase ("What has been") the double thread of the theme as originally stated and as modulated. Again we find the significant initial stress, "Point,"

which, as hitherto, marks its line as opening or closing a thought unit. The "one end, which is always present" is so in a deeper sense than was mere "time" above, since we are speaking of the potential (but not future) as well as the actual. Have we here something of the "presence" Gabriel Marcel describes in *Mystery of Being*? As always, the layered meanings offer shifting faces. Like sliding planes of graphite in comparison with other crystals having marked lines of cleavage they yield more to microscopic analysis than under the geologist's hammer.

The next verses, in which we move out of the philosophical realm into the psychological and thence into the projected garden itself, are transcribed here with spaces between the half-lines to suggest the experiment of reading down the four first halves as if they were continuous:

| | | |
|----|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 11 | Footfalls echo | in the memory |
| 12 | Down the passage | which we did not take |
| 13 | Towards the door | we never opened |
| 14 | Into the rose-garden. | ... |

Again it is pattern more than statement which conveys the underlying tension between wish-fulfillment and frustration. We are teased into regarding "Footfalls echo down the passage towards the door into the rose-garden" as climactic fact, ignoring the mounting force of the denials until we are brought up short with

| | | |
|----|-----------|---------------|
| 14 | | My words echo |
| 15 | Thus, | in your mind. |

The recall to reality is complete. The unnoticed personal pronoun "we" becomes suddenly specific in the possessives "My" and "your." The incomplete line increases the finality. The parallel of "My words echo" to "Footfalls echo" implies a correspondence of "in your mind" to "in the memory" and to the latter phrase's expansion in the next two and a half lines. "Thus [comma]," carrying strong stress and duplicating the urgency of "Down the," "Towards the," "Into," is a triumph of compression and a hint of the second pervasive theme of the poem, that of the problem of communication.

The next three lines are set apart in a kind of visual isolation:

| | |
|----|--|
| 16 | But to what purpose |
| 17 | Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves |
| 18 | I do not know. |

They seem parenthetic rather than transitional. Their deliberately faulty syntax gives rise to a healthy crop of ambiguities centering on the function of "Disturbing." A first reading takes it as a gerund—"But what is the purpose of disturbing . . . I do not know," which seems to express the futility of stirring up buried memories. Another possibility ignores the break with the preceding sentence, refers the clause "to what purpose . . . I do not know" to "echo . . . in your mind," and sees "Disturbing" as a participle modifying "My words." The absence of line-end commas does not militate against this interpretation⁸ but the yoking of images it enforces—the bowl of rose-leaves in the mind—would be less metaphysical than merely inept, and leads us to reject as jejune such a reading and to prefer the unjustified gerund. We may however assign a double role to "But to what purpose" and let it remain a tacit comment on the sentence before it at the same time as it relates to "Disturbing"

The sound links are subtle. Paired assonances in stressed syllables of adjacent feet, a device broached above in "Towards the door" (line 13), occur in "purpose / Disturbing" and "bowl of rose-." The abbreviated line 18 reproduces singly the d-d plus o-o sound-shape of 17:

| | |
|-----------------|-----------|
| disturbing-dust | bowl-rose |
| do | know |

We are tempted to mention counterpoint again in the mirroring of "words . . . / Thus" (14/15) in "Disturbing . . . dust." A final glance at these lines leaves us wondering why it is "My words" and "your mind" rather than the reverse, and whether the "dist- . . . dust" combination is intentional.

With line 19 we move into the quick-phrased, half-believed, half-experienced atmosphere charged with verbal reminiscence⁴ and highly personal import—the multiple power of the "x" in this equation renders it susceptible of many values.

| | |
|----|---|
| 19 | Other echoes |
| 20 | Inhabit the garden. Shall we follow? |
| 21 | Quick, said the bird, find them, find them, |

⁸ Eliot in a letter to the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement* (Sept. 27, 1928, p. 687) claims that "verse, whatever else it may or may not be, is itself a system of punctuation; the usual marks of punctuation are differently employed."

⁴ See the garden in *Ash-Wednesday* II (CPP, p. 62), the hermit-thrush in *The Waste Land* V (CPP, p. 48), Kipling's *They* and Grimm's *Juniper Tree*.

22 Round the corner. Through the first gate,
 23 Into our first world, shall we follow
 24 The deception of the thrush? Into our first world.

The effect of enchantment is fostered by the personification of the "Other echoes" (or, less compelling, their employment in synecdoche) and the blending of the concrete and abstract in "Through the first gate, / Into our first world." The participation of the reader is ensured by the repeated invitation "Shall we follow?"—the objects (of "follow") fuse the echoes with the thrush's call; the destination is more state than place. One recalls just such a deserted formal garden whose alleys and terraces and elusive and insistent thrush seemed to transport one miles and years from actuality into a sort of Midsummer's Eve spell. "Deception" is a telling word in the face of this illusion. The passage from action to reflection is almost instantaneous, from the bird's imperatives to the second "Into our first world" punctuated as a complete sentence in its meditative repetition of the phrase which in the line above has linked the two modes of experience. Following close upon "find them, find them, / Round the corner [period]," the capitalized "Through the first gate" and its parallel "Into our first world" seem to belong to both the hurried directions and the hesitant acceptance. This double-duty syntax is an old device,⁵ but here it works by insinuation rather than by challenge.

The tense usage is interesting in the light of the opening lines which asserted the present-ness of all time. "Shall we follow?" is less future tense than present intention, but "said the bird" is a genuine shift, anticipating the consistent past of the largest portion of section I which follows—as far as the last "said the bird" which leads back to (present) considerations of time past and future and ends on a repetition of lines 9 and 10, a fitting refrain to terminate the first of the five formal divisions of the poem.

The "they" passages (lines 25-31 and 32-41) exhibit a progression in two phases to a climax of realization, then a rapid dénouement.

25 There they were, dignified, invisible,
 26 Moving without pressure, over the dead leaves,
 27 In the autumn heat, through the vibrant air,

⁵ See *The Waste Land*, lines 220-222 (CPP, pp. 43-44):

. . . the evening hour that strives
 Homeward, and brings . . .
 The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, . . .

28 And the bird called, in response to
 29 The unheard music hidden in the shrubbery,
 30 And the unseen eyebeam crossed, for the roses
 31 Had the look of flowers that are looked at.

The focal phrases are "There they were" (25 and 32), introducing either step, and "And they were" (40), at the peak. The succession is from perception via external objects (the bird, the roses) to a somewhat more immediate awareness ("behind us, reflected in the pool").

32 There they were as our guests, accepted and accepting.
 33 So we moved, and they, in a formal pattern,
 34 Along the empty alley, into the box circle,
 35 To look down into the drained pool.
 36 Dry the pool, dry concrete, brown edged,
 37 And the pool was filled with water out of sunlight,
 38 And the lotos rose, quietly, quietly,
 39 The surface glittered out of heart of light,
 40 And they were behind us, reflected in the pool.
 41 Then a cloud passed, and the pool was empty.

The echoes, or the sources of the echoes, "they," may perhaps be most satisfactorily referred to as "presences." "Invisible," "unheard," "hidden," "unseen" describe their first manifestations, sensed (although extra-sensorily) in 25-27, recognized in the response attributed to the bird (28-29) and to the conscious roses (30-31). But once "accepted and accepting" they accompany our steps, "dignified" (25), "in a formal pattern" (33), through the second set of negating adjectives, "empty," "drained," "dry" (34, 35, 36) to the mirage of 37-39. Line 40 gives the illusory fulfillment of "what might have been," line 41, "what has been." There is a kinship of feeling here with Barrie's *Dear Brutus*, but the whole can be taken quite simply as record, not allegory. The hint of negative purification (a third and very important theme of the *Quartets*) is developed more explicitly in section III of *Burnt Norton* as well as later in *East Coker* III, *The Dry Salvages* III and *Little Gidding* *passim*.

There are more phrasal parallels which strengthen the correspondence between the two blocks of verses. After each "There they were" we find the double modifier, with amplification in 32 by means of the appositional "as our guests" and the conjunction between the participles. "Moving without pressure" (26) matches "So we moved, and they" (33); again the second member is amplified, here with the added subject pronoun. Three prepositional phrases modify the form of

"move" in 26 and 33 and occupy the same line positions (the second half of 26 and 33, both halves of 27 and 34); in the second trio a disyllabic noun replaces each monosyllable of the first, while the adjectives are identical in syllable count but mirror-fashion: dead-autumn-vibrant, formal-empty-box. The "pool" lines (35-41) represent a lengthy insert with its own internal *amplificatio* in the repeated "pool" (the word occurs in five of the seven lines), "dry," "and the," "quietly," before the bird is readmitted:

- 42 Go, said the bird; for the leaves were full of children
- 43 Hidden excitedly, containing laughter.
- 44 Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
- 45 Cannot bear very much reality.

This time the hidden music in the shrubbery is revealed as children's laughter, still unheard because contained (29, 42-43). And human kind must go, abashed by the unseen eyebeam (30, 44-45). Deeper than irony is the recommended flight from the reality of intense interpersonal experience ("My words," "your mind," "the door we never opened").

"Go, said the bird" (42 and 44) also closes the inner envelope that "Quick, said the bird" (21) began. After it comes the summary already remarked:

- 46 Time past and time future
- 47 What might have been and what has been
- 48 Point to one end, which is always present.

Line 46 varies, lines 47-48 duplicate 1 and 9-10 and the circle is complete.

Book Reviews

Painting and Reality (Bollingen Series XXXV: A. W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, 4) by Etienne Henry Gilson. New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1957. Pp. xxiv + 367. \$7.50.

As I sit at my typewriter before a pristine page bearing only title and names of the author and publishers of the book I would review, I am transported to thoughts of the author about the theory of privation, and wonder what form this review should take, what sort of thing it will become, and, because the purpose of books is to stir men's minds, I find myself pondering again the mysteries of understanding. Why have so many thousands of words been penned explaining painting? Admittedly, it speaks for itself in its own terms. That painters continue to paint attests that it is still a living art. Books which explain art are books about words. In a world where feeling seems suspect, where material values alone seem respectable, such books all too often have an odor of propaganda; a sort of frontal attack on the Philistines, replete with diversionary actions, smoke screens which envelop positions theoretically rendering them invisible to assault, all on the theory that the best defense is to attack.

Painting and Reality is not such a work. It is, I believe, a work with which to reckon, the mature work of an acknowledged scholar. Etienne Gilson is the author of books in the fields of history, philosophy, and metaphysics, and this particular book rounds out his writings by adding a serious work in the field of aesthetics. His intimacy with all schools of philosophy and with the writings of artists, his ease and precision of expression, his insight into and sympathy with the creative artist, and above all the integrity of the book cut through a great deal of the mystique in recent writings on aesthetics. He grinds no axes, though the Thomist background of the man and an aura of Apologetics break through the writing now and then, not to injure its objectivity, but to enrich the object. In the whole of the book there is but one curious lapse, which I shall mention later.

Painting and Reality is a good book, a significant book. Carefully read and pondered it has much comfort for the creative artist. It can give him assurance as to the worth and dignity of his work and the permanence and effect of his creations and, as consequence, a better understanding of his status with attendant self-respect. It explains what to an artist always seems the fickleness of his public. It accounts for the interest in, or lack of interest in, what is known as "subject" in painting by a clear explanation of the idea. There is about the book a two-fold air—the patient step by step building of a reasoned concept, and the rich insights of a man of taste. Mr. Gilson leaves little to chance. He defines his terms with precision and generally notes exceptions.

It is this latter habit that is disconcerting to the reviewer. It leaves him little with which to quarrel. He deals with critics with some adroitness. After admitting a positive role for the critic, in which he is permitted to point out perceived reality, he adds:

If a bad painting is something that, as a work of art, has failed to achieve actual existence, negative criticism can do little more than either to overlook the presence of a reality that escapes the eye of the critic or else futilely to point out the empty place where something that ought to be there is not to be found. Now, there is no way to prove that something does not exist: between what one does not see and what is really not there, the distinction is not easy to make. . . . (p. 132)

This pungent statement has real meaning in the context of the book—for reality is not left to chance, and as applied to a work of art is by no means all embracing. Becoming does not mean become, and being is a state which must be recognized as having all the potentials of existence. A painting that has become has achieved reality and possesses a force co-existent but not necessarily co-equal with other beings. There is here a clear signal for positive criticism and a challenge, unless one would be quarrelsome, for understanding.

The folly of saying how a book should have been written by an author, or a painting painted by a painter, is nonsense *qua* nonsense. There is purpose, however, in saying, though it cannot change in one iota the work under discussion, what a work means to an individual. The interplay of ideas between beings is both the basis of learning and the wine of life. If the traveler who has made a journey returns, he may ease those about to commence with helpful data. He may mark the springs where they may rest and be refreshed, and above all his assurance that the far places are really there may prevent the novice from turning back just short of goal.

It is with this thought in mind I relate my own journey through this book. It proved something of an adventure. In a busy creative and administrative life, a lifelong habit of reading can be indulged only with restraint. Books read tend more and more to be technical and specific in character, less philosophical and abstract. Consequently, at first I found the going rough and seemingly circuitous. Written as lectures and revised for publication, how extensively I do not know, the text first moves with a slowness that left me impatient. There is a great care given to definitions. Ideas are handled like bricks being laid in a wall.

In retrospect one sees how firm is the wall, how stout and true, and how carefully made are the bricks—but like most building processes the time of building seems long, which served to remind me that “great experiences are not only undergone, they are chosen and suffered.” A less determined reader could weary of the pace and abandon his interest, which would be a loss to himself.

There is, too, extensive use of footnote *en page* quotations from authors or references, always well chosen, which a reader like myself must habitually run down. These are too conveniently placed. Often exciting they encourage digressions, pleasant roads leading elsewhere. There is a danger here of dalliance which should not be given “too much rein” when there is serious business at hand. Such time consuming excursions might be lessened if the notes were placed more inconveniently at the back of the book to be perused with leisure after the text. There is no other quarrel with format. The book is well designed, cleanly printed, beautifully annotated; it includes an extensive bibliography and a superb index.

And what is special about *Painting and Reality*? The most provocative idea, in contrast to a long history of writers who have attempted to synthesize all of the arts under one rationale is Mr. Gilson's clear attempt to prove that

painting is a very special art with a nature uniquely its own and a reality which is in itself special. The limitations embodied in this idea make his conclusions much more understandable. The implications are that in trying to find single solutions applicable to diverse and sometimes contradictory natures, we too often set ourself impossible or needless tasks. He begins immediately, under the general heading of *Physical Existence*, to make clear his preoccupation with the art of painting:

The ontological nature of this approach to the study of painted works of art entails limitations to which philosophers and art critics rarely consent to submit. They are fond of talking about art in general, itself considered as an expression of what they call "poetry," that is, in the universal sense of the word, the primary process that is "the secret of each and of all arts." (J. Maritain) From this lofty point of view, there is no reason not to consider reflections about the plastic arts as directly relevant to "poetry" understood in the universal sense that has just been defined. *Not so in our own inquiry. Starting as we do from the fact that paintings are, or exist, we have no right to assume that their mode of existence has anything in common with that of other works of art.* (p. 4)

The italics are mine. From this point onward the reader is never allowed to forget the special nature of painting. There are no invidious comparisons, just a structuring of existence in all its aspects with unusual perceptiveness.

Best of all and most rewarding to the mature reader is this perceptiveness. In developing his thesis Mr. Gilson leads us through a maze of historical concepts and writings of individuals concerning the arts. The hand of the experienced teacher is ever present, briefing ideas of great men, pointing out the changes which time has worked on accepted theories. *Painting and Reality* makes no pretense at historicity, but through analogy and illustration manages to bring most of the western aesthetics into brief focus. Particularly so in reference to modern art and its special problems. This is one of the few books which put these into mesh with classical philosophy. All of which makes the reading of this book a distinctly worthwhile effort and a very real pleasure. I find myself referring to ideas expressed in it again and again in my thoughts.

And now I come to what is to me a disturbing lapse. On page 294-5 there is in the textual matter dealing with "picturing" distinct from "painting" properly so called, a brief and essentially unimportant apology for the use of this in "Christian worship." As the preceding text deals largely with non-representational painting perhaps this is to justify the use of the "imitational," but it would seem to give sanction to a kind of effort that all too often makes our churches ugly. By no other word in the text could I sense that true art could not or would not lend a dignity, reverence, and atmosphere to any sanctuary, the effect of which could heighten religious experience. Coming so near the end of the book this step backward leaves me a little shaken. I wish it had been omitted.

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Stewards of Excellence by A. Alvarez. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.
Pp. 191. \$3.50.

In *Stewards of Excellence*, A. Alvarez has collected eight of his own essays on modern English and American poets—Eliot, Yeats, Pound, Empson, Auden, Hart Crane, Wallace Stevens, D. H. Lawrence, and, by way of example, Frost, Robert Lowell and Richard Eberhart. He sees the essays as evincing two central concerns: "first, since twentieth-century poetry has depended so much on the combination of English and American influences, what are some of the essential differences between the two traditions? Second, why have the great creative possibilities of modern poetry come, in fact, to so little?" He gives the answer that the difference lies in the American poets' preoccupation with discovering or forging a tradition—an activity which has left them considerably more limited in their effectiveness than are the English poets.

This proposition, as it is scarcely new or startling, should allow the reader to concentrate on the shrewd observations Mr. Alvarez has to make about individual poets—as, for instance, that Frost is not a nature poet but "a country poet, whose business is to live with nature rather than through it." Or that Stevens' poems center around the moment at which observed particulars come alive: "And this is not a projection of the poet's self. It is a moment of purity when what is grasped is neither the commotion at the surface of the thing observed nor the commotion inside the observer. It is something that sparks between them: an essential imaginative life." Or what he points to as Empson's invention for writing "complex poetry almost without metaphor . . . by a kind of grammatical stammer which fixed attention upon those thin, weightless little words which are normally hardly noticed. . . ." Such pieces of observation are fresh and shrewd and rewarding.

They are given less weight, however, because of a controlling central proposition I find overriding the less controversial one he states, and that is that the best English poets, confident in a tradition, have worked toward "a naked personal strength" which the Americans, because of their preoccupation with finding out what it was to be American, have not attained. In the light of this thesis, Yeats and D. H. Lawrence and even Empson come out well, and something may be said for Hart Crane alone among the Americans. In Yeats, Lawrence, and Crane, at their best, Mr. Alvarez sees "a complete truth to feeling," unhampered by the search for form.

Probably the best essay in this book is that on D. H. Lawrence, for the effect of "naked personal strength" results, in Mr. Alvarez's thinking, from the single cause of having no preconceptions about technical form, and that condition is most completely satisfied in Lawrence's verse. The evidence of his generalizations about the rhythmic qualities in Lawrence's verse is the weakest part of that discussion; that I consider it weak is merely a further indication of my fundamental disagreement with his central proposition.

In an essay appearing in *The American Scholar* for the Summer, 1959, Mr. Alvarez defines the kind of criticism he approves, what he calls "primary criticism"—"criticism that, as rationally, deliberately and lucidly as possible, gives a sense of what the poetry is like." Mr. Alvarez performs this task for Lawrence's poetry, arriving at a concluding statement which should help one to read Lawrence's poetry with increased appreciation:

In place of the old patterns the modern poet has to rely far more heavily on his own native intelligence, on his ability to feel accurately, without conceit or indulgence; to feel, that is, when he has "thrown his feelings down the drain." He is left then not with a vague blur of emotions or a precise, empty dialectic, but with the essential thread that runs beneath the confusion, with "the instant; the quick." This, I believe, is the real material of poetry, material which could not take any other form. This inner logic is quite as difficult as its older formal counterpart. It depends on getting close to the real feelings and presenting them without formulae and without avoidance, in all their newness, disturbance and ugliness. If a poet does that he will not find himself writing in Lawrence's style; but, like Lawrence, he may speak out in his own voice, single and undisguised.

In this essay, the critic, it seems to me, is performing expert primary criticism. And I would agree that the accurate tracing of emotional shifts and balances may furnish proper subject-matter for poems which may be organized as he has here described.

But this is scarcely the only subject-matter or the only way of setting it down. The singleness of such a standard, especially as Mr. Alvarez attempts to establish its rightness, leads him to discuss a rather strange list of poets. Yeats and Eliot would be universally conceded as "stewards of excellence"; and Pound and Auden have been recognizably active in proposing standards. But the others are arbitrary choices, made, I suspect, to demonstrate his central thesis. His discussion of Wallace Stevens, for instance, begins and ends with the contrast he wishes to make to Lawrence: "Early on, Stevens seems to have discovered the theme of his poetry; he played variations on it throughout the rest of his work. Lawrence's gift was to remain continually available to experience." So that, in the end, Mr. Alvarez is able to praise only those poems in which, ambition forgotten, Stevens can allow a relaxation into "a slighter and more personal perfection."

Mr. Alvarez writes easily and confidently, and his sensitivity and intelligence shine through his manifest prejudices against poems that move in a realm he does not understand, or, understanding in part, cannot approve.

His attempt to return the criticism of poetry to its subject-matter is worthy. The tendency to limit the approved subject-matter to the personal and autobiographical is more questionable.

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Camus by Germaine Brée. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1959. Pp. x + 225. \$5.00.

These are still early days for a book-length study of Albert Camus, and many previous attempts have suffered from a lack of distance and perspective in which the writer's work may be situated. Germaine Brée is as well equipped as anyone in the United States to study Camus and his art; her book is an important contribution and it commands attention from all who are seriously concerned with the interpretation of contemporary literature.

Miss Brée's study of Camus consists of 24 relatively brief chapters, and falls into two main parts: *sa vie, son œuvre*. The biographical presentation covers chapters one through six; the subsequent chapters deal with the genres of Camus' œuvre within a loose chronological pattern: early essays, fiction, drama, and later essays. This organization makes for lucidity and ease of exposition, but again and again, the very brevity of each chapter tends to prevent the author from probing as deeply as she might into the implications of a particular work. At its best, Miss Brée's book constitutes a high-level popularization of its subject, but the fragmentary and piece-meal character of her discussion is disconcerting, and the strict separation of one work from another results in an atomization of Camus' writing, so that the connections between, say, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Etranger* or *Caligula* receive only casual examination.

This fragmentation and dissociation of one work from another is in fact the expression of the author's deep conviction that Camus is primarily an artist rather than a philosopher, and that his ideas are in themselves of only secondary importance. Without dissenting from this point of view, one may wonder if the opposition of philosophy and art is as rigorous in Camus' case as Miss Brée would have us believe. By discussing *L'Etranger* in Chapter 13 and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* in Chapter 20, she loses the opportunity of defining and clarifying the rich and vital interaction of the two works. Camus has succeeded far more than most writers of our time in converting ideas into imaginative expression, but to approach this expression through literary genres is to suggest an artificial heterogeneity and disunity in the totality of his work. I wonder if Miss Brée's study would not have been more substantial if she had followed a genetic or more rigorously thematic pattern of organization. As is, the book is too much of an introductory essay, too much concerned with information and with summaries, and too restricted in its framework.

It may be too soon for us to have a study of Camus from a comparative and international perspective. Miss Brée is well aware of the role of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche, of Gide and Kafka, of Malraux and Faulkner, in Camus' art, but only rarely does her discussion of his literary backgrounds and affinities, and the forces shaping his development, move outside of France. She says virtually nothing about the question of the role of recent American fictional techniques in *L'Etranger*—a debatable issue, but one that should not be passed over. Her remarks on Dostoevsky and Camus are suggestive but remain only *aperçus*, and while she recognizes the importance of Nietzsche in Camus' intellectual development, she offers little by way of concrete illumination of their relationship. Perhaps these matters are not appropriate to an introductory study, but their absence points out how completely Miss Brée has concentrated on a presentation of Camus from within.

From this standpoint, there is much to reward a careful reading of the book. The author was fortunate in obtaining the active collaboration of her subject. Camus' notebooks and manuscripts are explored here for the first time, and they are used effectively to illuminate his works. The account of Camus' first novel, *La Mort heureuse*, is particularly valuable for its revelation of his early literary preoccupations and for the measure of the distance of Camus' development which it provides. The same is true for his early dramatic endeavors. The sheer abundance of new and exciting information makes this book indispensable.

As with almost any critical study, there is bound to be some questioning of individual interpretations and judgments. Meursault emerges in Miss Brée's pages as a passive, unheroic, and unsympathetic figure; to me, he seems far more intelligent and more likeable, and in the final pages, more heroic, than Miss Brée seems to find him—but I should add that our sympathy with Meursault stems in part from our knowledge that he did not commit a premeditated murder, and his character is revealed as much in brief flashes of insight that suggest a deep reserve of powerful intelligence as in articulated reflection or statement. In interpreting Meursault's intelligence, one should emphasize Camus' art of dramatic suppression rather than charge his hero with stupidity or incomprehension.

Other matters of judgment also invite comment. Miss Brée moves rather lightly over *L'Etranger*—to my mind Camus' best work—and emphasizes *La Peste* all out of proportion to its merits. *La Peste* may indeed be humanistic in implication, but it is certainly not concrete in its evocation of experience, certainly not "the most disturbing, most moving novel yet to have come out of the chaos of the mid-century." If *La Peste* is over-rated, the plays are clearly under-rated. Miss Brée is at her best in her discussion of Camus in the theatre, but it is not fair to reduce the plays to dialogues of the mind, to "the décor of a mental universe." I should agree that the best of them is *Caligula*, but time may prove it to be an even better play than she admits; the concluding sentence—Caligula's defiant cry, "Je suis encore vivant!"—is not simply an evocation of the terror of recent history, but a passionate assertion of the quest for absolute certitude and power, metaphysical far more than political, rising out of the same anguish and struggle that animates *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. Miss Brée relegates Camus' exploration of the absurd to his pre-war epoch, but the essays in this volume were far more vital and relevant during and immediately following the occupation than she seems to recognize, and their continuing relevance for our time springs from a deep accord of Camus' attitudes and the immediate present. I am most in agreement with Miss Brée's judgment of *L'Été*, which contains some of Camus' very best writing, and which constitutes in its lyrical and intensely personal utterance a unique achievement in his art.

Miss Brée points out that between 1951 and 1956, Camus produced no major work. One may wonder if he has done so since. The essays which make up *Actualités* and *L'Homme révolté* are major testimonies of the role of the artist as both witness and combatant, and their importance for Camus' personal development is undeniable—but from an artistic standpoint, the loss in imaginative expression is not offset by the gain in ideological clarity. Miss Brée does not tell us what she considers Camus' best work, but there are good grounds for holding his career since *L'Etranger* one of unfulfilled promise. On the other hand, anything which Albert Camus may write cannot fail to be of the keenest interest. Germaine Brée's book stems from a firm belief in his central importance in contemporary literature. Her readers will be grateful for her contribution to our knowledge and understanding of one of the most compelling and arresting writers of our time.

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The Fugitives, A Critical Account by John M. Bradbury. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1958. Pp. xi + 300. \$5.00.

Fugitives' Reunion, Conversations at Vanderbilt May 3-5, 1956. Ed. by Rob Roy Purdy. Introduction by Louis D. Rubin, Jr. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1959. Pp. 224. \$5.00.

Within the space of about a year we get two very different books looking back over the careers of the now conspicuous group of American poets, critics, and professors who during the early 1920's at Vanderbilt put out the little magazine called *The Fugitive*. John M. Bradbury is a Professor of Humanities at Union College, Schenectady; he gives us an early, a proto-professorial history of a literary movement—before the dust is laid or the troops (the "Confederate generals") have stopped moving. Each Fugitive is divided into his phases, and his phases into his volumes of verse and prose, until nearly the very moment when Mr. Bradbury went to press. Meanwhile, the Fugitives themselves, or all the important ones, along with a few friends and editors, got together and held a kind of thirtieth or thirty-fifth class reunion at Vanderbilt, with an exhibition, two dinners, and two public meetings, speeches, poems, and wives, and in addition, what now becomes much more publicly accessible, four prolonged jam sessions tape-recorded behind closed doors.

A conviction that appears very strongly in both these books and is a main force in getting them produced is that the Fugitives do constitute a dynamically unified, cohesive, actual group—a kind of entity which has had a massive impact on the course of American letters and which is a prominently identifying feature of the work and career of each true Fugitive. Some of the Fugitives themselves seem a little skeptical or dismayed by this notion. The poets at the reunion spoke of their having been "shocked" in the late 1920's to discover that they were beginning to be looked on in that light. Requirements for a full or true membership are perhaps not quite clear. But roughly we may say that a Fugitive is nowadays one who was a member of a circle of instructors and students at Vanderbilt during the years 1922-1925, who held meetings and published the magazine. Or it may be enough to have been a Freshman there shortly after the heyday and to have been a close friend of some member of the original group. The present Fugitive is preferably a poet, novelist and critic, but he may also be a simple professor or even a business man who has an interest in philosophy and poetry. These conceptions make certain obvious difficulties for orderly narrative. Thus Mr. Bradbury finds that Cleanth Brooks, not "technically" a member, because of a late arrival at Vanderbilt, nevertheless reveals in one of his recent critical essays that "he is, and has been for long, a committed Fugitive." The novelist and professor Andrew Lytle was another late comer, but his very definite if minor "Fugitiveness" appears in his recent writings. Two English professors, William Frierson and Walter Clyde Curry, although their biographical credentials are excellent, enjoy only a "technical" Fugitiveness. A related anomaly is that one group of Fugitives, the Nashville business men Alfred Starr, Alec B. Stevenson, and Jesse Wills and the political scientist William Yandell Elliott, who necessarily appear only on the margins of Mr. Bradbury's literary account, turn up in the very bosom of the Nashville conversations. Again, the Boston psychiatrist and sonneteer Merrill Moore, who also is in the heart

of the conversations, is in Mr. Bradbury's view "from the beginning a Fugitive-inspired phenomenon, rather than a true Fugitive." A rather too serious pre-occupation with too many labeled entities (a neglect of Occam's razor) is one of the most salient faults of Mr. Bradbury's book. He likes to use such ugly words as "Tatean," "Ransomism," "Ransomic" (repeatedly), and (once) "Ransomically." At one point, exhibiting a couplet of an early poem by R. P. Warren, he is sure just which words are derived from Ransom, from Tate, from Eliot.

The chief fault of Mr. Bradbury's performance results I think just from his over-systematic program of making the Fugitives into a school or movement, trying to embrace in one unified book all the various works of so difficult and formidable a list of writers as Ransom, Tate, Warren, and Brooks. We have such related sets of chapters as "Apprentice Tate," "Tate as Critic," "Tate's Fiction," "Tate as Poet." The method is almost necessarily a kind of end-to-end brick-laying or carpet-laying of book reports—synopses of plots and arguments, with critical judgments added, or, for some of the more inscrutable poems, simply observations on motifs and images. The diction is the most correct and technical philosophico-literary lingo of our age—now and then somewhat cutely used, or pompously. Mr. Bradbury has courage; he is willing to say outright which novels or poems look not so good as they ought to, which critical doctrines are stretched too far. The defects of this part of his undertaking seem pretty much unavoidable, given the nature of his ambition, his assumption that all these problematic and varied works in verse and prose *had* to be laid chronologically end to end in order to make one book, one faithful master pattern.

The chief excellence of Mr. Bradbury's history seems to me to appear in the strong main lines which he is able to draw around his subject; that is, he is a good historian of ideas, in his several summations and especially in his "Conclusion." The truth does seem to be that the Vanderbilt Fugitives of the 1920's gave one of the biggest pushes, perhaps as Mr. Bradbury thinks the biggest, to the mid-century American "religio-aesthetic reaction" against progressive "liberalism" and scientism. The most obvious immediate cause of their discontent, the local evil from which they fled, was the new post-war vulgarized South, industrialism and boosterism, Progress and Profits, the era of "the Golden Glow." But their opposition was so radically conceived that in succeeding years it worked out in ever-widening circles into a magnificently coherent record of protest against all the popular ideologies, against the very temper, of the times. The list of enemies, writes Mr. Bradbury, includes "all modern creeds of 'progress' Marxism, Jeffersonian liberalism, finance capitalism and materialism, philosophic positivism, and public education." What then is the constructive Fugitive principle? What is *their* philosophy? Through all their variations, the Fugitive philosophy may be described as a return or an attempt to return to a concrete fullness of human experience, a recognition and reverence for the whole—the land, the history, the stabilizing tradition, the responsibility, the authority—The World's Body, the tensional completeness, the impure reality, the paradoxical confrontation. The recognition of the whole was a refusal of abstractionism; it entailed above all the difficult recognition, the acceptance, of evil, and was hence no less a refusal of meliorism. Mr. Bradbury sees the immediate prompting of all Fugitive thought in the stern Judaistic "dualism" of John Crowe Ransom, his now celebrated "irony," his pessimistic but not anguished preoccupation with man's *hard* situation. The Fugitive insistence on facing reality, on rooting the idea

and the ideal in the obdurate stuff of experience, meant that not only materialism but idealism was an enemy, and so they were in flight not only from the immediate post-war industrialized South but also from certain aspects of their own past—the nostalgic, the romantic, the feudal, the sectionally patriotic, the fundamentalist. (The Scopes trial was a rallying symbol—several times alluded to in the Reunion conversations.) Next in importance to Ransom's "dualism," a second, more theistic influence, which Mr. Bradbury at one point calls "medieval monism," was introduced to the Fugitives from T. S. Eliot as he was discovered during the twenties by Allen Tate. Mr. Bradbury remarks, I think correctly, a strong affinity between Ransom and his pupil Warren, a common secular emphasis of their humanism. A fact which he does not notice but which comes out briefly in the Vanderbilt conversations is the opposite affinity of Tate and Brooks, in the religious concern which completes the humanism of each.

Parallels can be drawn between the early activity of the Fugitives and that of such post-war American expatriates as Eliot, Stein, and Hemingway; or their ideas can be set in the context of distant pre-Existentialist rumblings in nineteenth-century Europe, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Dostoevsky, or of such nineteenth-century Americans as Thoreau, Melville, Henry James, and Henry Adams. "The Fugitives, however," observes Mr. Bradbury, "are incurably Southern, and have always been quick to repudiate a common heritage with their Northern predecessors, whose underlayer of Puritanism and abstractionism has . . . repelled them."

The major Fugitive battle, on the literary front, has been, as Mr. Bradbury observes, largely won. "If an avant-garde has continued to move beyond Fugitive positions, it does so in tacit acknowledgement of the achievements of the men who opened the new country to them." Perhaps Mr. Bradbury exaggerates the vision and the generosity of some of the avant-garde. He correctly observes the strong development of "Jungian and anthropologically oriented" ideas in today's "newer" new criticism." He might have mentioned too the newer and more theoretically fortified assertions of historical relativism which the success of "Fugitive" criticism, or simply of criticism, has provoked during the late forties and the fifties. (The original opponents of the critics in the American Academy were not relativists but historical determinists of various sorts, biographical devotees, and emotive appreciators—such changes has the dialectic whirligig brought round.)

But "Fugitiveness" as a movement can scarcely be traced beyond the beginning of World War II. After that there are simply individual once-Fugitive writers—a few of them very successful and influential. There was a period which Mr. Bradbury calls the "golden era" of Fugitive criticism—roughly 1936 to 1943—with Ransom's *The World's Body* (1938) and *The New Criticism* (1941), Tate's *Reactionary Essays* (1936) and *Reason in Madness* (1941), Brooks' *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (1939), Brooks and Warren's *Understanding Poetry* (1938) and *Understanding Fiction* (1943). This period was approximately coincident with the career of Brooks and Warren's *Southern Review* (1935-1943). (Just behind that was the Harvard oriented *Hound and Horn* (1927-1934), of which Tate was a southern regional editor, and *The American Review*, starting in 1933, and of course *The Sewanee Review*, with ups and downs in its relation to Fugitives.) Perhaps that "golden era" in criticism is the place at which many of Mr. Bradbury's academic readers will remember that they came in on the Fugitive story or first became clearly aware that something had been going on.

One of the merits of Mr. Bradbury's book is the simple narrative function (very efficiently carried out) of giving us the main names, titles, and dates, the events and groupings. (His "Selected Bibliography" seems well selected and comprehensive. But published information about the early Fugitive activities is scarce, and so I think he might have included, in addition to the important primary source article by Tate in the *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, April, 1942, a useful secondary survey by Robert Daniel, "The Critics of Nashville," in *Tennessee Studies in Literature*, University of Tennessee, 1956, and a primary source which I find referred to there, R. P. Warren's "Autobiographical Notes" in the *Wilson Bulletin*, 1939.)

The socio-economic rebels known during the 1930's as the Agrarians (campaigning mainly in two collections, *I'll Take My Stand*, 1930, and *Who Owns America?* 1936) were Fugitives (Ransom, Davidson, Tate, Warren, and Lytle) in a second main phase. A little earlier, during the late 1920's, the chronicle runs through an uncertain, suspended period, during which the Vanderbilt men were moving around, traveling abroad on Rhodes scholarships, attending graduate schools in this country, trying out teaching jobs or journalism in New York. And behind that lies the now fabled eponymous period, 1922-1925, and behind that, just after World War I, another Vanderbilt club, the Calumet, and the early career of J. C. Ransom, three years a Rhodes Scholar, who returned to teach English at Vanderbilt in 1914. And contemporary with him the strange, now mysteriously patriarchal figure of the retired business man and world-traveler Sidney Mtnon Hirsch—of whom more a little later.

The conversations at Vanderbilt in the spring of 1956 found some of the returning Fugitives a bit embarrassed at their position, apprehensive of what was expected of them. There was a certain air of the "mortuary" about it all. "We are what the scholars call a *corpus*," said Allen Tate. "A long time back at public executions," said R. P. Warren, "they let the culprit ride on his coffin while the band played a tune of his selection. . . . it's like putting frog legs in the skillet in the grease in order to find how the frog felt when he jumped. The legs will twitch all right, but what are you learning?" In a short summation on the third day: "We have been looking," said Cleanth Brooks, "at a last year's bird nest." It may be questioned whether the Fugitives did succeed in dredging up anything very definite or coherent about that long-past dawn period which they were reliving. Still the reliving does seem to have taken place—in some specially exciting way. "The Conference," says Mr. Rubin, "was successful in turning back the clock. For once the individual Fugitives were convened together behind closed doors, and the tape recorders began turning, something strange, even a little awesome, happened. They became a group again." A good many words were wasted, much repetition and fumbling did occur—a good deal of talking beside the point, of grabbing and pawing, of merely holding action, noises, to keep possession of the floor. At what *ex tempore* gab fest would this not be true? But if these tape recordings have not been doctored, by either participants or editor, as I have the impression they have not, the level of conversation was in my opinion very high. If we have heard some of these voices before at meetings, lectures, debates, or in smoke-filled rooms at conventions, the play of personalities comes off the printed page in a very lively, convincing way—the slow, ironically muted corrections and explanations of Ransom (surely the most genuinely courteous and charitable literary man of our time), the sudden,

bouncing ripostes of Tate, the gusty anecdotal snatches and staccato of Warren, the mildly irritated patience, the frustration, of Brooks at his ironical encomium of Hemingway being misunderstood. There are short snatches of conversation, especially of anecdote (about Ransom's first appearance before his Oxford tutor in philosophy, for instance, or, from Warren, about Ransom's receiving "with composure" his two author's copies of *Poems about God* while in France during World War I) which will deserve their echoes in future writing about the Fugitive school.

Perhaps the thing that will be most surprising to an outsider is a certain sort of relation which obtains between the literary Fugitives and their non-literary or less literary fellows. Almost the whole first session, for instance, and some moments of later sessions were taken up with the useless question why none of the Fugitives has ever produced an epic poem. Why did the conversations thus get out of hand? Why did "a group of poets who had achieved so much" spend so much time discussing what they had never tried to achieve? Because the Fugitive literary men, on this occasion at least, were exceedingly humble and pliable. They were bullied into this topic and carried along, unable to escape from it, by two aggressive non-literary members, Alfred Starr, Bijou theatre-chain president and arts patron, and William Yandell Elliott, Harvard political economist—and especially, or about ninety per cent, by the latter. Elliott was apparently a fringe member of the early literary group, a Rhodes scholar and Oxford Ph.D. (1923), who kept ducking in and out of Nashville during the great years. He is now mighty conscious of his own lifelong concern with poetry and his intimacy with poets (take Yeats in those "all-night sessions" at Oxford, for instance, or those "thirty-page letters" from "A. E."); he is proud of his efforts while abroad in "sending" some of those "people" over for the American "boys" to consider. He is proud of his broad outlook on things and the pragmatic importance of his thinking. "I work on the planning board of the National Security Council." He is obsessed with the idea that poetry ought to have a definite socio-political function (This ties in, or seems to, with the whole Agrarian business on the last day)—and hence he has the idea that the epic, formulating the ideals of a nation and a culture, is the most important kind of poem—and his Fugitive friends have been somewhat delinquent in not setting themselves to that task. (Throughout the conversations a certain "undercurrent of feeling" is generated, that the Fugitives *should* have written some epics.) Elliott, in other words, appears as the Arnoldian in this debate with the poets, but, by a paradox of the history of ideas, he is also the neo-Philistine of the Fugitive group.

About equal to Elliott as an anomaly in these talks—or perhaps surpassing him as a curiosity (though not so durable or so voluble)—is the venerable and bearded Sidney Hirsch. (See the admirable frontispiece group photograph.) He was in the old days a Nashville resident, more or less invalidated in the home of another Fugitive patron (James Frank). He was a former New York business man, author of certain dramatic pageants or the like, a world traveller, amateur etymologist, esoteric symbolist, Rosicrucian perhaps, cabalist, and neo-Platonist. "He believed in the wisdom of the ancients." He had been a great befriender and promoter of the movement. "Mr. Hirsch," Tate recalls in his article of 1942, " pontificated at the sessions, reclining in a sort of oriental luxury among pillows." He had written a poem called "The Fugitive Blacksmith," and it was

he who insisted that the young men name their magazine *The Fugitive*. It was near the end of the second session of the 1956 conversations, devoted to miscellaneous reminiscences, that Hirsch's name, in his absence, first came up prominently. Alfred Starr testified that during thirty years of living in town he had not once talked to Hirsch or even seen him. William Yandell Elliott recalled that in the early discussions Hirsch was a "dominant character." "You had almost to break away from Sidney, eventually . . . and we all did . . . in order just to get clear of this hypnotic, mesmeric kind of influence. But there's no question at all about the power of his mind; and it's very sad that he has absented himself from this performance." "You must feel his power to understand his part in our beginnings." Who now was sent in search of Sidney and secured his presence at the Friday afternoon session? Strenuous efforts were no doubt made. He appeared (in time for the photograph during the noon recess), he spoke at the session, he pontificated (by urgent solicitation of poets present)—he mystified—he was just as the Fugitives in the morning session had described him.

HIRSCH: It's a very amazing thing that he [Tate] uses certain Platonic terms and certain Greek words—gives the derivations and has paronomasia on them—which he informed me at the time that he did not know, was not aware of. Am I correct about that?

TATE: Yes.

HIRSCH: You are now?

TATE: Yes, much more so.

HIRSCH: . . . And, again, Plato uses those two terms and he calls them, as you recall, *logos endiathetos* and *logos prophorikos*. Now I'd like to ask if you were aware at the time that you were doing it, or did you come in the category of Plato who said that the poet arrives at these conclusions by great flashes of genius? Is it a fair question to ask?

RANSOM: Yes, it is. Yes, I remember you said that, and that I had a feeling that my poem was more serious than it sounded. . . .

Hirsch, like Elliott, was something of a solemn show-off. "I've given it some considerable thought. I've thought especially about. . ." Why, Hirsch attended a New York performance of T. S. Eliot's *Cocktail Party*, in company with "a very noted psychiatrist" and "a highly cultured European lady" ("made pilgrimages to Goethe's place, and so forth"), and they found the play "terribly tedious," they were "frankly bored." Except for a single startling passage in the third act! [That Shelley passage, no doubt, or what follows, about "a sudden intuition, in certain minds."] "The man had utilized the entire play as a vehicle in order to put across the two or three lines." At the end of this afternoon session Hirsch disappears from the record as abruptly as he has appeared.¹

The fourth session, next morning, is devoted peaceably to some reminiscences of Agrarianism and attempts to reconcile its socio-political aims with the true individual Fugitive desire simply of being an honest and skilful poet which Tate (with his warning cry "This discussion has become much too highfalutin") has reiterated from the beginning, with more or less steady support from Warren,

¹ Donald Davison, "The Thankless Muse and Her Fugitive Poets," *Sewanee Review* (Spring, 1958), supplies some colorful paragraphs about Hirsch c. 1914-1916.

Ransom, and Davidson. One thing that comes out of these conversations is the extraordinary and pervasive courtesy and charity, and mutual tolerance, the love and admiration, of these Nashville men for one another—and especially the deference and forbearance of the literary men toward the less literary, of the stronger toward the weaker, and of the younger, the now middle-aged, toward the elders. One other thing, asserted by Tate in his reminiscence of 1942, discovered and emphasized by Mr. Bradbury, and now corroborated and dramatically if quietly revealed by the conversations, is the early and profound intellectual leadership of John Crowe Ransom. There is not even any momentary danger of our confusing his steady and telling responses, the softly resistant, dryly oracular utterance, with the red herrings and exhibitionism of figures like Elliott or Hirsch.

The meetings ended, almost as if the gesture had been rehearsed, with a last joke by Warren—"lowering" the tone "not quite to the smoking car level"—about a girl delinquent, the last of 5,000 interviewed in some kind of survey, who, when asked why she did it, replied, "I likes it." "[laughter] Well, I think that's what the Rockefeller Foundation's going to find out—[laughter] We haven't got any alibis."

One of the "other" persons present at the closed Vanderbilt sessions was Mrs. Louise Cowan, Ph. D., Vanderbilt, 1953, author of still a further book on our theme, entitled *The Fugitive Group: A Literary History*, to be published by the Louisiana State University Press during 1959. It is a merit as well as a limitation of Mr. Bradbury's book that he has kept strictly clear of the paths of gossip and special sources, confining himself to information already in print. Mrs. Cowan's book will be "based on a wealth of unpublished source material."

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The Critical Writings of James Joyce, ed. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann.

New York: The Viking Press, 1959. Pp. 288. \$5.00.

A James Joyce Miscellany: Second Series, ed. Marvin Magalaner. Carbondale:

Southern Illinois University Press, 1959. Pp. xvi + 233. \$5.00.

The Sympathetic Alien: James Joyce and Catholicism by J. Mitchell Morse. New

York: New York University Press, 1959. Pp. xi + 169. \$4.00.

For the second time within a year, the present reviewer has undertaken a quarterly round-up of new books pertaining to Joyce; and on both occasions he has had three volumes to report on; from which he infers that the current rate of production in the field is a book a month. That means, of course, that the subject is being pursued to an intensive degree of specialization. Thus Joyce's relationship to religion is one of the central questions raised by his works—perhaps too large and controversial a question to be subsumed as yet in any single or comprehensive treatment. Already we have Kristian Smidt's suggestive monograph, *James Joyce and the Cultic Use of Fiction* (Oslo, 1955), Father William Noon's thorough study of *Joyce and Aquinas* (New Haven, 1957), and

Kevin Sullivan's somewhat doctrinaire *Joyce among the Jesuits* (New York, 1958). If this monographic approach to Joyce proceeds farther, there are several other important aspects of his religion still to be explored: notably the influence of the liturgy on his writing, or again his special concern with Giordano Bruno, Nicholas of Cusa, and similarly heretical thinkers. The latest contribution, J. Mitchell Morse's *Sympathetic Alien*, is written from a point of view which the title—Joyce's own phrase—may suggest. But it is not the broad synthesis suggested by the subtitle, *James Joyce and Catholicism*. Rather, it is more specialized than its forerunners. It is a gathering of eight articles, most of them previously published in scholarly journals, relating Joyce's fiction to the thought of Augustine, Erigena, Loyola, and other Catholic theologians.

Theology is never irrelevant to the consideration of Joyce's ideas; but his attitude toward it was tangential, to say the least; and consequently the base it provides for commentary is bound to be rather oblique. Obviously, Professor Morse has spent many more hours than Joyce ever did over Migne's *Patrologia*, and many of the parallels he has adduced seem too general in their application to be particularly illuminating. Joyce, the collector and orchestrator of phrases, made a poignant theme out of *Agenbite of Inwit*; but that he conceived his characters in the light of the ethics propounded by Dan Michel's treatise, I have not been convinced. Mr. Morse is more at home in medieval than in modern literature: he credits Stephen Dedalus with the authorship of the line, actually quoted from Yeats, about "the white breast of the dim sea." Yet he is a perceptive reader of Joyce, and his *obiter dicta* have a value that carries well beyond the matter at hand. He is at his best in showing how Joyce's puristic doctrines of esthetics, both critical and creative, are respectively grounded upon Thomistic and Augustinian precedents. With engaging candor he states his own reservations, thereby criticizing the limitations of Joyce's art-for-art's-sake. Inevitably, the tension between the artist's sympathy with the church and his alienation from it must be summed up by the term "ambivalence." But Mr. Morse distinguishes nuances, even as he documents his terms: Joyce's "conscience is not that of a conformist nor altogether that of a rebel, but the permanently uneasy conscience of an artist."

The interpretation of Joyce in the nineteen-fifties is described by Marvin Magalaner, in his introduction to the second *James Joyce Miscellany*, as "work of consolidation." Professor Magalaner takes modest pride in the fact that American universities have been the principal sponsors of what today—without irony or self-consciousness—we call Joycean studies. His attractive and interesting compilation draws upon the recent activities of "fifteen major Joyceans," in the phrase of the jacket. Since there are eighteen contributors in all, that phrase seems slightly invidious; but both the Academy and the cult of Joyce have their hierarchies, which it is not for a minor Joycean to question. The earlier manifestoes and polemics, the subsequent revaluations and commentaries, have been succeeded by the high seriousness of professional scholarship. Not all of these consolidators, however, are quite as solid as scholars ought to be. One of them, for example, proclaims his discovery of a work which may indeed have relevance: "I do not know that Joyce read George Moore's excellent novel, *The Lake* . . ." Why should the scholar not know? Joyce's own testimony to that effect is embodied in Gorman's biography. Yet, given the new material coming out currently, it is not surprising that some of the old gets overlooked. This mis-

cellany presents unpublished letters, several unfamiliar photographs, memoirs, an iconography, a reproduction of the famous schema for *Ulysses*, and five additional pages of *Stephen Hero*. We may receive the latter gift with mixed feelings, since it outdates the recent second edition without completing it.

But we can only applaud the commemoration of Joyce's most devoted friend, Paul Léon. And we must be grateful for a large number of chapters which fill in our knowledge or stimulate further discussion. "Who was M'Intosh?" Mr. Bloom's last riddle, is ingeniously pondered by John O. Lyons. Henry Morton Robinson advances, along with a list of the ever-changing cognomens of H. C. E., a bold suggestion as to his ultimate identity. Mitchell Morse, temporarily deserting patristics, expresses a lively dissenting opinion about Molly Bloom. Herbert Howarth entertainingly rambles, from Jonsonian to Joycean comedy, in a direction pointed by the shadow of Oscar Wilde. A more influential shade, Charles Stewart Parnell, is discussed by Adaline Glasheen, in an essay which is richly informative until it moves from history into mythography. Walton Litz paves the way for future researches into *Finnegans Wake* by outlining and illustrating the chronology of its composition. The most substantial article in the volume, and for me the most fascinating, is Joseph Prescott's "Stylistic Realism in *Ulysses*." Here, with the fullest and most concrete documentation, we are permitted to follow the very process of writing as Joyce proceeded from draft to draft. We are encouraged to hope that Mr. Prescott, who has been meticulously scanning Joyce's notebooks, manuscripts, and proofs, will soon be giving us the definitive study of *Ulysses* in the making. We also look forward to a third *Miscellany*, hoping that it will have as much to recommend it as this one.

The publication of the last quarter—or of the past few years—that does the most to solidify our understanding of Joyce is the collection of his *Critical Writings*, admirably edited by Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann. They have gathered together fifty-seven miscellaneous pieces, dating from Joyce's fourteenth to his fifty-seventh year. Several of these are from unpublished manuscripts in the Cornell and Yale University Libraries: a sampling of his schoolboy compositions, the paper on "Drama and Life" that he read to his college debating society on an occasion remembered in *Stephen Hero*, lectures on Irish culture translated from the Italian in which they were delivered at Trieste. The other items are reprinted, mostly from all-but-inaccessible files, with helpful notes and succinct introductions. These include the three essays published during Joyce's university days, twenty-three newspaper book-reviews, translations of his articles from *Il Piccolo della Sera*, program notes on the repertory of his short-lived theatrical company, his poetic *ripostes* and *jeux d'esprit*, the operatic prose poem on John Sullivan in the manner of the *Wake*, and testimonial letters to periodicals, plus that original letter on the foot-and-mouth disease which would inspire Stephen Dedalus to dub himself "the bullockbefriending bard." If all this be reckoned as criticism, it is far from purely esthetic or formalistic; it is criticism of life with a vengeance. Much of it is hack-work, dashed off to sustain life in years of struggle. Some of it formulates artistic principles later put into practice. Some of it mocks, both gaily and bitterly, the artist himself and his contemporaries.

More than once in his correspondence Joyce described himself as "a bad critic," and his grudging references there to such writers as Proust seem to bear him out. Yet one of his notebooks, now at the University of Buffalo, contains some appreciative jottings on Proust. Joyce's literary faculties were so highly

developed that he could not help illuminating whatever he chose to focus them upon; but—except for occasional sidelights—he concentrated, more and more single-mindedly, on the problems encountered or engendered by his own artistry. He was more of a critic before he became a creator; we can watch him, in his undergraduate essays, preparing the ground. Nevertheless, his fiction abounds in critical discussions, such as the Aristotelian passage in the *Portrait*. Just as he redefined classical conceptions for his own purposes, so he recast in his personal image romantics like Mangan and Blake. His reviews were frankly springboards for Stephen's leaps. His modernism, as of the opening decade of the twentieth century, occasioned not only his celebration of Ibsen but his gibes at Matthew Arnold and the Victorians. Although he was to write nostalgically about Wilde, Shaw, and Synge from the continent, he voiced his doubts about the Irish Literary Movement in reviewing a book by Lady Gregory herself, who had got him his post as a reviewer. But who can say, in retrospect, that those doubts were unjustified; that the "mean influences" so ringingly challenged in "The Day of the Rabblement" have not multiplied to waylay writers; or that the young man's intention to be an artist, which must have sounded brash when he declared it, was not overwhelmingly fulfilled?

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